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BDSM

A guide for explorers
of **EXTREME EROTICISM**

The ultimate book on kink

572 pages, **230** original photos

Foreword by Dr. Mark Griffiths

Preview

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This book is recommended by:

AISPA, Italian Association of Applied Sexology and Psychology;
IES, Institute for Sexual Evolution, Milano;
Psychology Dept., L'Aquila University

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Author's notes

While the information provided in this book is correct, based on firsthand experience and/or cross-checked with several sources, extreme caution is advised when acting out any of the described practices. Given that their effects vary depending on each person's physical and psychological characteristics, the author denies any liability for any damage of any nature that may arise from putting these into practice.

The scientific notions contained herein are presented in simplified form. You are therefore advised not to consider this book a complete source of scientific information and to refer to specific publications for an in-depth study on the various topics presented.

Please note that the male gender is routinely used throughout the text for the purposes of simplicity. However, except in those cases where they would be impossible for physiological reasons, the described practices are valid for both genders.

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Foreword

*Dr. Mark Griffiths,
Professor of Behavioural Addiction
Psychology Division,
Nottingham Trent University, UK*

I was delighted that Ayzad asked me to write the Foreword to the book you are now reading. I'm sure a lot of my colleagues won't approve, but this book is better than any academic paper I have read on extreme sexual behaviour. Not only is it well written, but it is from the perspective from someone who knows what they are talking about rather than someone like myself who reads others' work and summarizes in a way that others may describe as 'detached' or 'one step removed'. Put simply, Ayzad lives and breathes BDSM day-to-day and writes, describes, and evaluates in a way that is both informative and pragmatic. Anyone who wants to know the 'ins and outs' (no pun intended) of the sadomasochism scene could do no better and start with reading this enthralling guide through every conceivable type and aspect of BDSM.

For the past 25 years I have had an academic interest in extreme sexual behaviours. However, my interest in sexual extremities first began in my early teenage years, when I became a fan of the British pop group Adam and the Ants who sang about many fetishistic behaviours and opened up my eyes to another world far removed from the sex education I received at school. I was amazed as a 14-year old schoolboy to discover a mainstream band singing about sadomasochism (songs such as *Beat My Guest*; *Whip In My Valise*; *Physical [You're So]*) and bondage (*Ligotage*; *Human Bondage Den*). I later went on in my academic career to publish a number of articles on the psychology and sexology of Adam Ant as he has arguably written more songs on sexual fetishes and paraphilias than any other artist.

His songs have covered vanilla sex (*S.E.X.*; *Sexatise You*; *Strip*; *Playboy*), general sexual fetishes (*Christian Dior*; *Survival of the Fetish*) specific fetishes like rubberism (*Rubber People*), transvestism (*Greta X*), voyeurism and exhibitionism (*Lady*) and infantilism (*1969 Again*), sex in

aeroplanes (*Mile High Club*), bathroom sex (*Bathroom Function*), high class prostitution (*High Heels in High Places*), sexual body art (*Red Scab*), sexual body piercing (*Punk in the Supermarket*), fellatio (*Cleopatra*), human orgasm (*Can't Set The Rules About Love*), homosexuality (*Bright Lights, Black Leather; Picadilly*), lesbianism (*All Girl Action*), and bestiality (*Juanito the Bandito*).

In my second year at university (1986), I attended a guest lecture by Dr. Alec Oswald on sexual fetishes and paraphilias which turned out to be the most interesting (and best) lecture I ever saw as an undergraduate student. I can still recall the content 30 years later. At the time, I thought it would be great to have a job where you could study and write on such extreme human behaviour and never imagined that I would be doing that – at least in part – three decades later.

It wasn't until 1997 that I first got the opportunity to give my own lectures on paraphilias as part of a module I taught on the psychology of human sexual behaviour. In 1999 I started writing articles on extreme sexual behaviours for the British magazine *Bizarre*. At the time I was more proud of my populist published articles on hypoxiphilia (autoerotic asphyxiation) and acrotomophilia (amputee fetishism) than my academic papers. In 2011 I started writing a blog on extreme human behaviour (addiction, compulsion, obsessions) but quickly realised that it was my articles on sexual behaviours (sex addiction, paraphilias, and fetishes) that were being most read. It also led to me publishing academic journal papers on topics that no-one had ever published on before, including the first ever academically published studies on eproctophilia (fart fetishism) and dacryphilia (crying fetishism), the latter of which has some crossover with BDSM.

It is probably these latter academic activities that led Ayzad to asking me to write the Foreword to this book. Although I am an acknowledged authority on behavioural addictions (i.e., addictions that don't involve the ingestion of a drug such as gambling addiction, videogame addiction, Internet addiction, sex addiction, etc.), I do not claim to be an expert on paraphilias and fetishes – and this book proves it. I learned more about BDSM from this book than all the other academic papers on the topic combined. Ayzad's own personal experience is at the heart of the book and it is what makes the book so readable. You know it is written by someone who passionately cares about the topic of interest: he has immersed himself in the BDSM world and demonstrates that the practice is neither strange or problematic.

I have always taken that what adults get up to sexually in private is fine as long as it's consensual – even if it involves giving or receiving pain. There are some sexual practices such as zoophilia (sex with animals), necrophilia (sex with dead people) and paedophilia (sex with children)

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that I draw a moral and practical line because animals and dead people cannot give their informed consent, and children are not mature enough to give informed consent. Informed consent is at the heart of BDSM practices and I have never problematized or pathologized the behaviour. This book highlights an incredibly wide range of BDSM practices that consenting adults can engage in and is a celebration of a much misunderstood human behaviour. I hope you enjoy reading *BDSM – A Guide for Explorers of Extreme Eroticism* as much as I did.

Further reading

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I think of you always. When I go to bed at night it is a kind of torture for me. I will not write on this page what fills my mind, the very madness of desire. I see you in a hundred poses, grotesque, shameful, virginal, languorous. Give yourself to me, dearest, all, all when we meet. All that is holy, hidden from others, you must give to me freely. I want to be the master of your body and your spirit.

JAMES JOYCE, writer

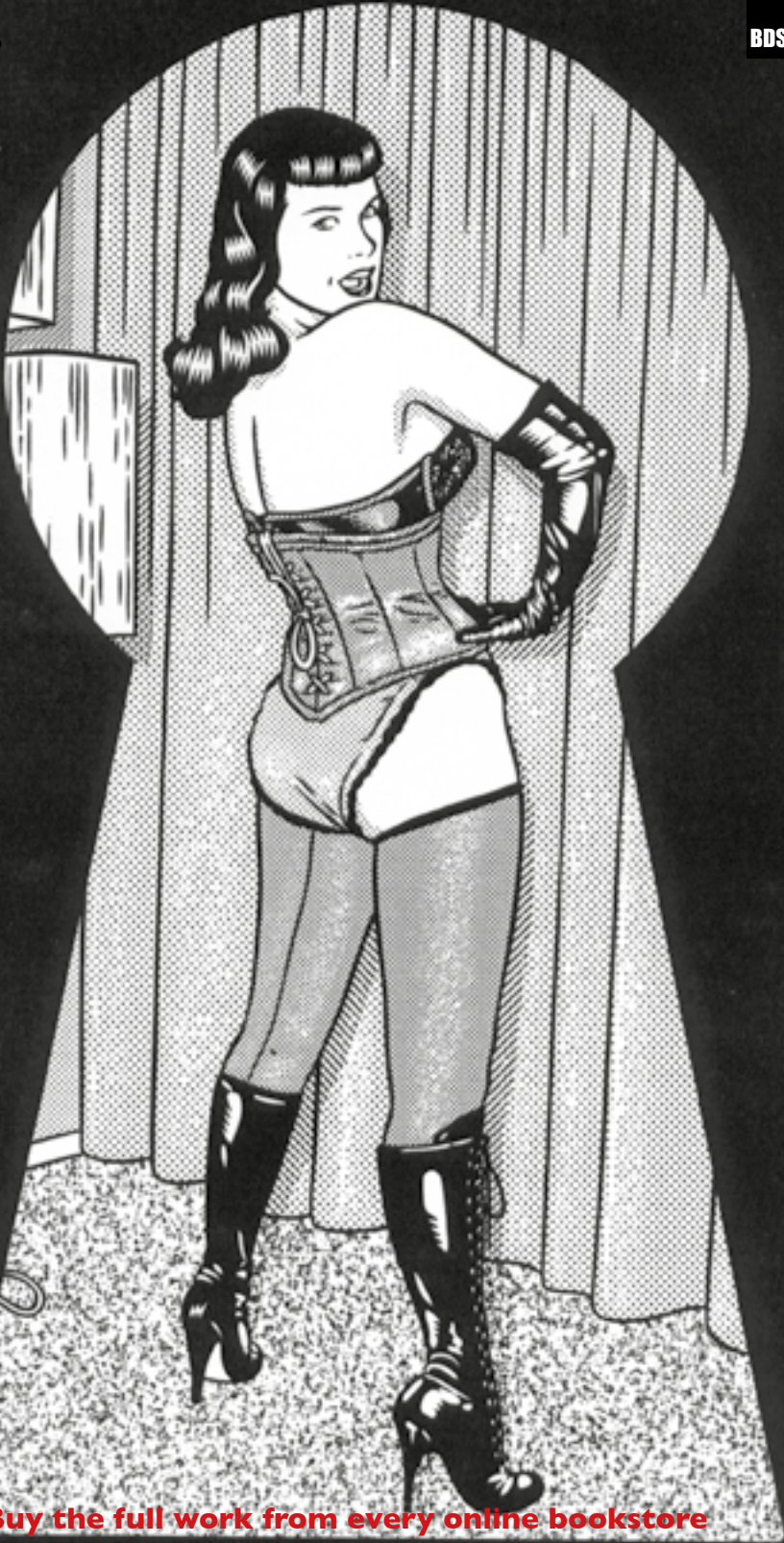
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Introduction

*He who cannot hear the music
thinks the dancer is insane*

RUMI

(JALALUDDIN MUHAMMAD IBN MUHAMMAD),
Sufi Master

This is the first international edition of *BDSM – A Guide for Explorers of Extreme Eroticism*, and the fourth update of a book originally published in 2004 in Italy, where it slowly grew to become an unexpected best seller. While I have done my best to revise it for a global audience, I am well aware that due to vastly different cultural and historical contexts, finding one key to suit all English-speaking readers is simply impossible. Depending on the country where you live, you might find a section somewhat peculiar or certain chapters downright outrageous; nonetheless, I hope you will appreciate my attempt to offer the most complete possible presentation of a fascinating and very complex phenomenon. As a matter of fact, this is the very reason I wrote this book in the first place.

Due to my own blatantly clear personal interest in erotic domination, I have now been studying this topic for over a quarter of a century. I have read a great number of works on the subject, but I have never managed to find a truly complete source of information. My impression is that BDSM literature typically falls into one of three categories. The predominant one is fiction, and no matter how titillating it may be, by definition it cannot be considered reliable. We then have a relatively small number of essays dealing with pathological anomalies written by and for medical professionals. These can be very interesting, but I often found them to be surprisingly misinformed on the wider reality of sane, happy BDSM play. Finally there is a sizeable corpus of very specific manuals created by well-meaning genuine enthusiasts who describe their own vision of extreme eroticism based on direct experiences and personal preferences.

While each group has its own merits, this situation forces anyone

looking to gain a real understanding of the phenomenon to work through a daunting mass of often badly researched literature and muddle-headed websites – a painful prospect for scholars, and a real danger for anyone seeking guidance on how to put their fantasies into practice. The well-engineered success of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, for example, has coincided with a worrying spike in the number of kink-related accidents all over the world involving people who had underestimated how extreme sex, like any extreme activity, must be approached cautiously in order to avoid getting hurt - physically or psychologically.

BDSM – A Guide for Explorers of Extreme Eroticism is my attempt at simplifying this approach by collecting all the information I have learned to date in a coherent and reliable reference work, informed by my journalistic background. As you will see, the chapters range from “You know, there is a little something called BDSM” to descriptions of the most intense and life-changing activities this subculture has to offer.

This approach has honored me with two important results of which I am rather proud. The first is seeing this book listed among the compulsory readings of various academic courses. The other is the many hundreds of readers’ emails thanking me for the answers they have found to their technical and existential doubts. Their kind words have confirmed my belief that there really was a need for such a guide: not to co-opt new followers to an imaginary “BDSM ideology,” but because in a field as complex as this one, which places serenity, safety and health on the line, the right information can literally change your life.



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Thanks to many different factors, these days the world is more accepting of unusual sexualities than it was in 2004. ‘BDSM’ has become a household word that today fewer and fewer people are mistaking for pathologic sadomasochism; the very concept of erotic domination and submission games is now considered more intriguing than it is scary. However, if you are still wondering about the actual meaning of the title of this book, now is the time to tell you that *BDSM* stands for:

Bondage Domination Sadism Masochism

Now it’s time to learn what it’s all about.

A MATTER OF INSTINCT

The *B* in *BDSM* stands for *bondage*, in the literal sense of ropes and knots. It also means ‘restraint’, evoking images of handcuffs and breathtaking corsets. Finally, it indicates a connection between two different people sharing something in common.

Together, the different interpretations of this word describe an erotic game considered the most tangible and extreme manifestation of the phrase lovers whisper to each other: “do whatever you want to me.”

D, *domination*, also refers to the pleasure - more cerebral in this case - of letting your experiences, emotions and sensations be guided by your partner’s will. While this always happens with sex, in *BDSM* the game can move beyond the bedroom, turning an ordinary moment into something special that livens up everyday life.

Some people maintain that the correct meaning of that *D* is ‘discipline’, referring to the rules imposed on the submissive partner’s behavior and implying a form of punishment whenever they are not respected. How far you want to push that side of the relationship is entirely up to personal taste...

The *sadism* of the *S* is not the stereotypical type we see in the movies, where the only way a weirdly dressed psychopath can reach orgasm is to make his prisoners scream in pain. Sure, it is no doubt natural for humans to experience a certain degree of pleasure when inflicting suffering upon others (physical or mental); watching children at play, free of social scruples, is enough to confirm this. In *BDSM* however this inclination is expressed with intelligence and a different intensity, but more importantly in a different spirit. As we’ll see in the following pages, the game consists in allowing the partner to experience a forgotten physicality, always within a very captivating erotic context.

Nor does the *M* of *masochism* in any way resemble the self-harm dealt with by psychiatry. Contrary to common belief, masochists who enjoy

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feeling pain simply for the sake of it only exist in fiction. There are however people who have learned to experiment with their senses and who, within the context of an erotic situation, can also appreciate the intense stimulation provoked by a painful sensation. There is nothing mysterious about this ability: it merely depends on the chemistry of the human body, which works the same way for everyone. BDSM is just one of the many ways of discovering this side of ourselves, with the bonus of being able to share our reactions with someone who'll find them especially pleasurable.

Extreme eroticism is all this and much more, and can be construed by each individual in the way that best suits their personality and characteristics.

What each of the letters in BDSM share in common is the rediscovery and exploration of typically human instincts, as long as this is done with respect and preparation. One is therefore left to wonder how something so normal can appear so strange and unusual, or even dangerous and immoral. But of course there is an answer.

Previously, in the last 130 years...

Let's go back to 1880 Europe, to meet Doctor Richard von Krafft-Ebing, alienist. He had nothing to do with Martians: alienists are the "doctors of crazies," normally called upon only for the most acute cases, when the symptoms become too dangerous or socially unacceptable. The concept of psychoanalysis was yet to be discovered, so Richard's therapeutic treatments involved the use of the latest scientific tools: straightjackets, ropes, ice baths and loads of morphine. In his writings for example we even find a proud



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endorsement of a newfangled cure for the “grave ailment” of masturbation in adolescent girls: cauterizing the clitoris with a red-hot iron.

In 1886 Krafft-Ebing collected more than two hundred of his most interesting cases in the book *Psychopathia Sexualis*, a cornerstone in the history of sexology. To better understand his working method, suffice it to read the contents of the first edition, presented below in its entirety:

- 1) Fragments of a system of psychology of sexual life
- 2) Physiological facts
- 3) Anthropological facts
- 4) General pathology (Neurological and psychological)
 - a. Sadism
 - b. Masochism
 - c. Fetichism
 - d. Antipathic sexual instinct
- 5) Special pathology. The manifestations of pathological sexual life in the various forms and conditions of mental disturbance
- 6) Pathological sexuality in its legal aspects
 - a. Moral offence in the form of exhibitionism
 - b. Rape and lust murder
 - c. Bodily injury, violation of things, cruelty to animals caused by sadism
 - d. Masochism and sexual bondage
 - e. Bodily injury, robbery, theft emanating from fetichism
 - f. Immorality with persons under the age of fourteen
 - g. Unnatural abuse (Sodomy)
 - h. Necrophilia
 - i. Incest
 - j. Violation of wards; seduction
- 7) Appendixes

Two things immediately stand out. The first is how every “sexual pathology” is easily linked back to one of four convenient categories; the other is the simplicity with which he equates practices as different as anal intercourse and homicide, or exhibitionism and the abuse of minors (of fourteen years of age, because back then at fifteen it was still normal to be married and possibly with children).

As we read the book, we also discover that for Krafft-Ebing, who obviously shared the morality of the society he lived in, the definition of *deviation* was rather broad. Basically, a deviation was anything that wasn’t sexual intercourse with a procreative purpose, provided that it was

consummated within the sanctity of a proper marriage and exclusively if initiated by the husband. Every other sexual activity – such as masturbation or oral sex – was considered symptomatic of a mental disturbance, which according to the directives of that era not only needed to be cured, but above all punished. I believe we are all aware of the atrocities perpetrated for decades according to this logic, and the trail of persecuted homosexuals and human wrecks reduced to a vegetative state in asylums.

All of this could and should have simply remained a morbid, curious piece of history if it weren't for the importance afforded to Psychopathia Sexualis until not long ago; an importance it continues to enjoy in certain contexts, not least of all the legal one. Moreover, Krafft-Ebing significantly contributed to a serious state of lexical confusion, which unfortunately lives on to this day.

A bit of literature

To get to the bottom of this mess it is worth brushing up on a few literary notions. Ancient French satire, for example.

Donatien Alphonse François de Sade was born in 1740. He spent his childhood at the side of the Dauphin of France and, just like all young men his age, served in the military during the Seven Years War. Like all gentlemen, he also frequented brothels and took advantage of his social position when the need arose to extricate himself out of tight corners.

It is worth remembering that in those days aristocrats saw the working class as animals with the gift of speech, and treated them accordingly - not to mention the social role of women, who had an even lower standing. Some historical records suggest that de Sade had gotten rather rough with several prostitutes, but was always granted impunity no doubt thanks to his highly ranked friends who often accompanied him in his jaunts.

The Marquis certainly had an impressive sexual appetite that often landed him into (slight) trouble, but only when his targets happened to be members of high society. The reasons behind his long and repeated arrests were essentially political, and can be traced back to the ongoing power struggles of the pre-revolutionary period and during the Terror. His passion for whips and immoral pantomimes was in fact seen as little more than an odd form of eccentricity, for that matter shared by enough people to justify an entire industry based on that type of eroticism even back then.

In short, in spite of his surname it wasn't de Sade who invented sexual sadism: it had always existed, albeit referred to by different terms. His literary works are the real reason his name is associated with all types of cruelty, despite the fact they are anything but erotic.

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Books like *The 120 Days of Sodom*, *Justine* or *Philosophy in the Boudoir* had been conceived as satire and social condemnation, despite being based on an undoubtedly intense form of black humor. De Sade's literary ploy is almost always the same: to describe the worst possible brutalities committed by powerful and immoral persons against poor and God-fearing people, then illustrate the former's degeneration as if it were arousing. His thesis is that virtue never pays, while the powerful and the wicked revel even when they choose to play at being the victim. His hope is that the reader – after masturbating – will be able to acknowledge the excitement provoked by the horrible degradation of a human being, subsequently feeling ashamed and ultimately improving their moral self.

The problem is that this last part eludes the vast majority of readers, already exhausted by the purplest of proses. What remains is a distorted perception: de Sade = Sadist = Criminal. You can bet Krafft-Ebing fell victim to the same misunderstanding.

Somewhat easier to understand is the work of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, born in Austria in 1836. A prolific author of novels and essays, his fame is owing to two thinly-veiled autobiographical books written in 1870: *Venus in Furs* and *The Divorcee*. Both recount a self-destructive passion for cruel women who use the protagonist as a toy upon which to inflict endless torment.

Here there are no hidden interpretations or other literary devices: they are purely onanistic stories, wherein the author's urge to destroy himself in impossible and totalizing affairs is complacently dissected. What he describes is a paradoxical self-abuse that finds its ultimate expression in death (elsewhere Leo even wrote about his fantasy of being eaten alive), falling squarely in line with clinical cases. And yet back then, just like today, the tendency to label everything reigned supreme. Thus, a new, handy term was coined to define this mental disturbance: 'masochism'.

It is worth mentioning at this point that the word *masochism* should in fact refer to what the French call *amour fou*, an unhealthy emotional dependence whereby one delights in the various forms of emotional abuse (estrangement, contempt, exploitation, etc.) inflicted by an "unattainable"

partner. The act of finding pleasure in physical pain is actually called *algolagnia* and is an entirely different kettle of fish... but given that the former term is commonly used for both things, I've played along in this book as well.

Birth of an error

Of course it's not like no one had thought of playing with whips and ropes before 1870. As a matter of fact, the first mention of this form of eroticism dates back to a 4th century B.C. anecdote by none other than the philosopher Aristotle (see p. 36). However it was only then that Sigmund Freud thought to combine the terms associated with de Sade and Sacher-Masoch to speak of sado-masochism, or S/m for short.

From that moment on a semantic short circuit was born. The same definition used to imply criminal behavior and serious pathologies also became the easiest way to refer to those sexual games previously alluded to with a variety of euphemisms and expressions (e.g. 'English vice', 'flagellatism', etc.), which had never really caught on anyway. Krafft-Ebing only made matters worse, feeding the collective imagination with images of a bunch of suicidal persons and assassins just waiting to commit terrible atrocities.

More damage would be inflicted later on by the hand of countless authors of movies, books and lewd comic books who, looking for a way to characterize their villains often associated sadistic stereotypes with their criminal characters. Their logic was the same by which all black people are a bit simple but great dancers, all blondes are beautiful and dumb, all cowboys are silent and fearless, all gay men talk in falsetto, and so on. And don't even get me started on the gutter press and its morbid approach, for whom sadomasochism and violence are one and the same.

Similar stories can be told about other mistaken locutions, such as the unfortunate case of sexual slavery. Given that in erotic games one of the partners plays a dominant role over the other, who in turn makes themselves completely available to the former's whims, the two are commonly defined as 'Master' and 'slave'. Clearly this has nothing to do with cotton plantations or the scores of poor sods who were forced to build the Egyptian pyramids; but remember we're dealing with enlightened characters such as Krafft-Ebing here. The result: throughout the twentieth century many were convinced that domination games were somehow connected to the exploitation of prostitution (they're called 'sex slaves' too, aren't they?) or the somewhat fictional 'white slavery'.

I presume there is no need to point out that the reality was quite different.

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The Sexual Revolution

The huge mess described above continued to feed on itself for decades, during which time those who engaged in unusual erotic fantasies were repeatedly misrepresented and made to feel guilty, to the point where most of them were ashamed of their own desires. It was only in the late 1960s that the rise of the Contestation and the Sexual Revolution began to challenge the general attitude toward sex and sexuality.

Thanks to these movements, the taboos surrounding eroticism were slowly broken down, and “deviant” practices such as homosexuality were gradually afforded a sense of dignity and social acceptance. Domination-based relationships and fetishisms, which following the Second World War had already inspired an impressive underground network of associations, publications and specialized products, became almost trendy and conveyed their iconography to the world of art, fashion and advertising. However, a century of prejudices inspired by traditional psychology still had to be worked through. Thus, in many Anglo-Saxon countries around the world, the most forward-thinking kinksters spontaneously adopted a philosophy based on popularizing extreme eroticism for the benefit of the general public. Their objective was to overcome preconceptions regarding this type of sexuality, offering factual information about its practices and how they should be performed in order to avoid unnecessary risks.

This took on the form of clubs, group meetings, literature and actual workshops. Even without any coordination or specific organization, the popularity of this phenomenon slowly spread across the United States giving kink a friendlier, more acceptable image. Across the ocean,

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Germany and the northern countries in general became the homeland of these activities, but each nation expressed its interest in a different manner. In Italy, for example, a series of specialized publishers and magazines popped up, while a certain fetish “look” became especially fashionable thanks to the dreamlike and sensual stories of the Valentina comics by Guido Crepax. One particular publication that brought the “modern” vision of sadomasochism into bookstores all over the world was a French novel that instantly shot to best-seller status: *Story of O*, published under the pen name of Pauline Réage by the journalist Anne Desclos, who wrote it as a loving gift to her partner.

We have now reached the eighties of the last century, a full one hundred years after that initial *Psychopathia Sexualis* where it all began. In spite of the great progress made against the discrimination of unusual sexualities, American activists realized that the lexical squabble surrounding the term ‘sadomasochism’ was continuing to pose an incurable handicap, embedded in the collective imagination. The solution was to create a new word that would erase all implications of criminalization and illness from something that really is just a harmless erotic game. The acronym BDSM represented the answer and was soon accepted as a positive change. Specialized publications and word of mouth among enthusiasts quickly spread the term around the world, but its strongest advocate was the newly created Internet.

For the first time in history, the Web allowed everyone to approach the world of sensual domination without compromising their privacy and provided handy information about all possible and imaginable practices. This - and subsequent cultural acceptance - opened up the ghettos of extreme eroticism, offering millions of intrigued individuals who would otherwise never have known what it was all about a chance to discover a whole new universe, much friendlier and accessible than they had ever dared to imagine.

Welcome to the world of BDSM.

What it's all about

*It would be possible to describe everything scientifically,
but it would make no sense; it would be without meaning,
as if you described a Beethoven symphony
as a variation of wave pressure.*

ALBERT EINSTEIN, physicist

Once established that BDSM isn't as gruesome as many people may think, we still need to settle on what *extreme eroticism* really means.

This is not an easy task, since *BDSM* – just like ‘sex’, ‘show’ or ‘food’ – is a so-called “umbrella term” used to group together countless widely varying activities and situations. Even though they are conventionally discussed as broad categories – as you’ll see in the following chapters – the world of BDSM thrives on non-conformism, fantasy and a certain anarchy that doesn’t like to be pigeonholed. Therefore it may be wise to pinpoint the shared principles upon which it is founded...

RECLAIMING SENSUALITY

It may sound cliché, but we must admit that we are living in an era of excessive *virtualization*. I am not only referring to the prevalence of computers in our jobs and private lives, but to the very social context of the developed countries in this century.

Physical encounters are being more and more supplanted by phone and video calls, emails or text messages. Confronted with the convenience of television, social rites such as attending a concert or a sports event have lost their significance. Even in public, communicating via smartphones is often favored over interacting with our neighbors. And on the subject of shared environments, those who use public transport are vastly outnumbered by a majority of people who choose to drive alone, secluded in a box that shuts them off from the outside world. Not to mention that purely intellectual jobs now prevail over manual labor.



All of this leads to a new, slowly evolving perception of the human body that is impacting on our relationship with ourselves and those around us. For instance, body contact outside of sex and “unusual” contexts, like sports or dancing, is disappearing from daily life for reasons of education, culture and habit. These same reasons have created a world where natural scents are either eliminated or covered up, while the noble effort to banish physical pain and exertion from our lives has freed us from even the slightest annoyance.

While living today is undoubtedly easier than it was in the past, this sort of social change has led to the gradual disappearance of sensuousness. To make a very simple example: never having experienced the horror of Hunger with a capital ‘H’ also implies never knowing the true pleasure of appeasing it. Sheltered in an increasingly comfortable and private cocoon, man is forgetting how to relate to his five senses and to his fellow humans, forsaking his own animal instincts.

The same goes for the emotional sphere: better education and improved social conditions lead to a certain dulling-down of emotions. Try remembering the last time you were really afraid, or felt truly powerful, or were so aroused as to lose control, or clearly perceived a sense of absolute freedom, or a truly broken heart. Yet these feelings – and not their toned-down versions in our average daily lives – are all part of the human experience. In a sense, not experiencing them is like not really being alive.

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Extreme eroticism exists, among other reasons, to mitigate this loss of sensuality, intended in the broadest sense of the word. Of course few people bother to intellectualize their sexual preferences to this extent. Yet there is no doubt that BDSM, especially in some of its most recent forms, is a response to the need to reawaken all the unexpressed potential of human beings.

What makes the exploration of senses and emotions especially pleasurable is of course the erotic context. BDSM is therefore a means of experimenting with yourself and the relationship with your partner, discovering how to use unknown or forgotten sensations to completely enjoy every nuance afforded by your meeting.

The manifestations of extreme eroticism range from the impalpable suggestion of a special gaze to the brutal ferocity of a fire brand. Such diverse acts, and the thousands more that can be experienced in between, have only one thing in common: the awareness – for an instant or forever – of being completely alive and present.

SSC – THE RULE BEHIND THE MADNESS

Exploring sensuality is fine, but with a caveat. As we saw a few pages ago, although everything is allowed in the world of BDSM this type of absolute freedom must not lead to improper or dangerous overindulgence. In order to establish some form of self-control, kinksters agree on one simple rule that represents the true common element of every extreme erotic activity. Like many other things in this field, it is identified by an acronym: *SSC*.

SSC stands for *Safe, Sane and Consensual*: three words which, if always kept in mind, ensure that no form of experimentation will bear any negative effects. So let's take a closer look.

Safe refers to the utmost care with which the various activities are performed. With BDSM as with anything else, it is wise to be prepared for whatever could go wrong. In order to minimize risks, it is standard practice to abstain from substances that may impair your judgment of the situation, such as alcohol, drugs and medication, both before and during play. By the way, are you sure you remember where you put the keys that unlock those handcuffs? Have you learned to take aim with your new whip before using it on someone? Are you positive that the chandelier hook will hold the weight of your partner, especially if they start thrashing?

Planning is paramount. The story about the guy dressed as a superhero who jumped off the wardrobe onto the bed, hit his head and then passed out is just an urban legend, but it's always best to limit blunders as much as possible.

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Sane was originally about being reasonable, in the sense of being able to distinguish fantasy from reality and refraining from foolish stunts. When the SSC slogan was translated from English into other languages however, the word often turned out to be a so-called *false friend*. That second ‘S’ is therefore taken to mean ‘healthy’ pretty much all over the world, and this broader interpretation is actually even better, as it covers all the medical implications of BDSM. After all, kink does involve a stimulation of both the body and mind that can get pretty intense, so knowing the possible repercussions of every practice and action is crucial. What sort of marks does a whipping leave, and for how long? How does a certain bondage of the wrists affect the blood flow in the hands, and what problems could it cause? What psychological traumas can derive from forcing a person to undress in front of a bunch of strangers? Can swallowing urine be a vector for sexually transmitted diseases?

These are just a few among the countless questions that kinksters should ask themselves before playing. To find the answers you can simply read up on each topic: this book is a good starting point, but you can never have enough knowledge. So dive into encyclopedias, specialized publications, forums and websites... but above all ask direct questions to those who have already experienced these practices firsthand.

Consensual is the key factor that discriminates BDSM from the excesses of certain abhorrent pornography and from the medical and legal interpretation of sadomasochism. This term translates as: “anything is acceptable, as long as everyone agrees to it.” It is essential however to remember that in order to agree to something, one needs to be completely aware of everything the game entails. Furthermore, should anyone suddenly change their mind at any time, play must stop immediately.

I’d like to stress two important implications here. The first is that consent must also take into account the law. Responsible people do not practice even the softest form of kink with minors, no matter how much they may beg for it. As a matter of fact, many kinksters refuse to allow anyone under 21 to join their games, since it has been proven that the prefrontal cortex – the part of the brain used to correctly assess the risks and outcomes of actions – does not fully develop before that age, hence any form of consent would not be entirely reliable.

Another fundamental point is that the notion of consent must be extended to every person involved. For instance, ordering your girlfriend to remove her panties and masturbate while you are dining out at a fancy restaurant might sound like an intriguing idea, but you must consider that

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the other patrons and the staff might not appreciate the show; thus it may be wise to restrain your enthusiasm out of respect for those around you.

The philosophy of SSC may sound like the polar opposite of spontaneity and fun, but it guarantees that BDSM is experienced with serenity and mutual trust. A little initial effort in terms of study and preparation will allow you to enjoy a future of otherwise unattainable pleasures; if you're looking for simpler yet blander intercourse you'd better look elsewhere. Finally, 'Safe, Sane and Consensual' also means absolutely respecting your partners, thus excluding all forms of violence and abuse from BDSM play. Yelling, fights and beatings have no place in the world of eroticism.

The illusory alternative: RACK

I need to make an aside here. A debate has been going on for a while – especially in non-English speaking countries – regarding an almost-alternative philosophy to SSC identified by yet another acronym: *RACK*.

This term was coined in the United States in 2005 and stands for *Risk-Aware Consensual Kink*. Its original intent was to contrast the undisputed optimism of 'SSC', drawing attention to how extreme activities always involve a certain degree of risk even when performed by experts. The message of both acronyms was that only through suitable preparation is it possible to avoid dangerous drifts: 'RACK' however sought to make the participants more responsible, preventing them from hiding behind a jolly motto. A noble intent, indeed.

Problem is, over time 'RACK' has been interpreted by a certain fringe of enthusiasts as 'if you accept to do these things it means you know what they entail, so don't blame me if anything goes wrong or you don't like it'. Personally, I find this a rather alarming spin, one that too closely resembles the arguments of those rapists who try to blame their victims. Regardless of the varying opinions, I suggest keeping your distance from those occasional fellows who boast "I do RACK, not SSC!" Thinking that one thing cancels out the other is a clear sign that they don't really get it anyway: without Sane, Safe, Consensual *and* Risk-Aware there can be no eroticism, extreme or otherwise. Now let's get back to more pleasant things.

COLLABORATION, NOT COMPETITION

SSC brings us to another key concept in BDSM: collaboration. Excluding autoerotic scenarios, the activities discussed here are generally practiced by two persons sharing the desire to experiment extreme sensations. We

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have already covered consent: now let's focus on the type of relationship between the partners.

Talking about domination, humiliation and torture, a *competitive* type of scenario is easily brought to mind: the dominant partner (normally abbreviated as 'Dom', or 'Domme' for females, and often capitalized) striving to break the resistance of the submissive one (called 'sub', all in lowercase), who does their best not to succumb. This sort of dynamic can certainly be found in the world of kink, but it represents an extremely rare exception: an anomalous play style, if you will.

In fact, in a normal BDSM session the relationship is *collaborative*. In other words, the Dom and the sub are both aware that they want to explore a given scenario and the sensations it entails, but most of all they want to share each step of the journey toward that result. The emotions in every single action are reciprocally offered in an endless circle, without any reluctance nor resistance, so there would be no point in opposing each other. The only real obstacles are the fear of violating personal barriers or taboos, and the instinctual defensive reactions of the body when faced with certain extreme sensations. So the Dom and the sub work together to overcome this type of block, not one against the other.

The difference is often quite subtle, but can be clarified by one example. Think of sexual intercourse: competition between the partners makes it less enjoyable for everyone, and in its worst form is called 'rape'. On the other hand, if the act is collaborative it is called 'making love' and is a sublime form of connection, greater than the sum of its parts. The actions are identical. How they are experienced makes them completely different. It goes without saying that in order to reach this level of harmony and collaboration it is indispensable to trust your partner. I doubt that even the most hardcore masochist in the world could abandon himself in the hands of a stranger, just like I wouldn't dream of laying a finger on someone who wasn't absolutely sure about their desires.

Still, even so and just like in any normal relationship, it takes time to connect and adapt to a new partner. Especially in the case of BDSM, where being able to read each other's reactions is essential, it is good to understand that before running a marathon you need to be sure you know how to walk.

THE TORTURER'S ETHICS

Besides the SSC principle, BDSM encounters rest on three additional pillars. The first, which is closely related to consent, is *limits negotiation*.

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This contractual-sounding term denotes the phase preceding the actual games, where the partners state with utmost sincerity what they want to do (but above all what must *not* happen) during their “session.” Despite the name, the logic behind this moment is not “if you don’t want me to do this, then you need to do that,” but rather to avoid any problems later on.

Imagine a typical situation: miss x is itching to be whipped by the pitiless Y, but she knows that in six hours she is going to meet her girlfriends for a swimming lesson and she cannot bear any marks on her body. If she simply said “do whatever you want to me, and while you’re at it please give me a good flogging” Y might misunderstand and leave her covered with rather embarrassing red stripes. So x clearly explains her predicament and Y (who’s infinitely sympathetic) makes sure he only hits her on the genitals, which will remain hidden by the swimsuit anyway.

Jokes aside, cases like this are self-explanatory, but the human psyche and physiology are full of surprises, so it’s better to make provisions for possible troubles instead that having to scramble to mitigate them once it’s too late. Would you like a specific example? A very determined slavegirl I know, who happily submits to the harshest treatments... and had to be rushed to the emergency room when an “ordinary” nettle rub on her privates triggered a violent allergic reaction. She had forgotten to warn of her uncommon hypersensitivity to histamines...

Similar situations may arise due to unusual phobias, medical conditions and of course depending on the circumstances and the skill of the people involved: not everybody can always do everything, and it’s best to know about it from the outset. For all these reasons, negotiation is considered an unpleasant necessity, especially between people who aren’t very familiar with each other and don’t really know what to expect from the partner. By the way: it’s not only the subs that have limits. Dominant partners may well not feel like playing in certain ways, and it is their right not to do something, even if they’re asked to!

It stands to reason that the Dom’s wishes must be respected (“know that I intend to...”), but even more so the sub’s (“ok, but don’t do...”). This is a point that must not be questioned, joked about, nor leveraged against the partner’s vulnerability: limits must be respected, and can always be renegotiated before the next encounter.

Safeword

Allow me a bit of Eurosnobbery for a moment. From my view here in Milan, the North American culture isn’t exactly famous for its sophistication or human tact. Only Americans, for example, could come up



with the concept of *dating rules* to create a rigid set of guidelines on how to act with a new partner. Their unique obsession with regulating how people should behave has also been extended to the world of BDSM, where it has strangely borne very positive fruits. More specifically, one particular fruit: the *safeword*, which was immediately adopted by the rest of the world.

The safeword is yet another cornerstone of BDSM sessions, and between partners who are already familiar with each other can represent a shortcut around the awkwardness of negotiating limits. It is a signal, spoken or otherwise, that can be used by the sub to immediately stop any and every activity.

Words chosen as safewords are generally simple to remember, but selected among those which would never be mistakenly used in the throes of passion (e.g. 'red' is fine, 'stop' is not). To avoid equivocations, it is standard practice for the word to be repeated three times. In those cases where speaking could be a problem - for example if you are gagged - other types of signals are used such as gestures, provided the sub isn't so bound that they cannot even do that. Failure to respect a safeword is considered a perfect reason to be banned from every BDSM environment, and of course to be sent packing by the partner.

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By the way: inexperienced people often think that setting up a safeword is a form of newbies' weakness, robbing "true BDSM" of its raw energy. According to a 1969 study by Glass, Singer and Friedman, however, the truth is just the opposite. Those who are in a difficult situation will be able to endure a much higher level of discomfort if they know there is an "escape route" at hand – and they tend not to use it anyway. Defining an emergency signal therefore ensures maximum intensity during an encounter.

Safewords are such an important and delicate subject among kinksters that over the years they have inspired several very interesting debates. Since a full understanding of every facet of this topic is clearly of critical importance, I urge you to also read the detailed recap I have published on my website, covering the finer points of the matter.

HNH

The third principle was formalized at the same time as the previous two, yet is far less known. The reason is that it could be considered somewhat superfluous given that it has already been covered by what we have said so far. Nonetheless it is worth mentioning, if nothing else for the sake of completeness. Once again, it is yet another acronym: *HNH*, short for *Hurt, Not Harm*.

Aside from the horror movie imagery it evokes, this slogan simply seeks to remind us that, whatever form it takes, extreme eroticism is a game designed to please all of its participants. It is therefore essential to absolutely avoid causing physical or mental harm to those generous enough to offer us their vulnerability; this is also valid for those playing the dominant role in the relationship.

Finally, for those who think that I'm overdoing the bleeding heart thing, I'd like to point out that HNH also means 'don't just pretend: if the aim of the game is to cause pain, do it for real'. In the following pages I'll gladly explain how.

JUST LIKE JAZZ

The few pages you've read so far were probably enough to guess that BDSM is a much more complex and wide-ranging subject than it is normally portrayed by the mass media. Before we continue, however, one important clarification is due.

During an interview about jazz the great Louis Armstrong once allegedly stated: "If you have to ask what it is, you'll never know." Words of wisdom indeed, which regrettably can also be applied to kink.

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This is not a case of gratuitous snobbery: no matter how precise I strive to be in the following chapters, some things simply elude words. It would be like trying to explain why sex is fun by saying it's all about a fleshy cylinder-shaped appendage that swells up with blood and repeatedly rubs against a number of slimy mucous membranes, causing friction, all of which is a lead-up to the moment when the duct that normally produces urine suddenly spasms, squirting a sticky substance towards an internal organ, which periodically sheds bloody necrotic tissue. All this is technically correct, but... yuck!

Describing BDSM is both easy and impossible, just like the above example. Furthermore, as is the case with everything concerning sexuality, there is no "right" way to enjoy these games and situations: each person interprets the suggestions of extreme eroticism according to their own vision, the heat of the moment and the partner's characteristics. Just like with jazz. Your only hope of wrapping your mind around it is to approach it without prejudice, making an effort to identify with the apparently crazy points of view of the kinksters we are going to meet. You don't need to love BDSM (or jazz) to get by in life, but it's always worth remembering that if so many people are into this weird stuff, there must be something good about it. And just like Armstrong used to say: "What we play is life, folks!"

A GUIDE TO EXTREME EROTICISM

In the next seventeen chapters we will cover most BDSM practices grouping them in order of complexity. We'll start with the mellowest (yet no less exciting) games and slowly lead up to really extreme activities, reserved to serious lifestyle players only. To limit the number of pages, I will only offer the basic information, covering each practice both from a psychological and eminently physical point of view. Delving into further detail would require several tomes, so where possible I will point out additional sources that offer a more in-depth analysis.

The final chapters are dedicated to a practical guide to BDSM places, from specialized clubs to the shops where you can buy the perfect fetish outfit or your first riding crop. There is even a guide to the Web and the online communities that can help you learn the ropes (ahem...) of extreme eroticism. You will also find a few tips on how to approach your first play dates or your first party, including a peek into the world of those who have made BDSM their job.

Previous editions of this book also included a huge erotic domination glossary and lists of books, websites, movies and other resources to complete your appreciation of kink. They had grown so large that I had to

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move some of them online to the *Resources* section of my website, where they are constantly updated. Trust me, it was the best I could do.

Just two more notes

Given the linear organization of this guide, it is strongly recommended to read its chapters sequentially, without jumping from topic to topic. If you read it in a different order you might miss terms and concepts indispensable to properly understand and perform the activities described.

In the spirit of offering the reader different viewpoints on the various aspects of BDSM, each chapter of the original Italian edition of this book closed with a brief commentary from prominent local kinksters, who described their personal experience with each topic. Translating those snippets would have been somewhat misleading for an international audience, as they were specifically tied to the unique Italian social context, its peculiarities and culture. I regret not being able to offer you equally enriching insights here, but I hope to work out an alternative for the next editions.