

WHEN SOMEONE
YOU LOVE IS
KINKY



DOSSIE EASTON *and*
CATHERINE A. LISZT

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Welcome, and Thanks

Can anybody really ever understand someone else's experience, someone else's life? We all know that an upper-middle-class female suburbanite might have trouble understanding what goes on in the heart and mind of a male inner-city denizen. But can that suburbanite really even understand the life of her next-door neighbor? If you've ever had the experience of attending a movie with a friend, then afterwards finding out that each of you had a completely different understanding of what that movie was trying to say, you have some idea of the challenge of bridging the huge gulf in perception between one person and the next.

Each of us brings a lifetime of experience, learning and belief to the task of forming our own perceptions. When we try to understand someone else's reality, we cannot help but be influenced by our background. Often, it's easy: you may not understand why your friend adores caviar when you think it tastes like, well, fish eggs – but you compare his love for this odd food to *your* love for chocolate truffles, and that gives you an idea of why he'd pay absurd amounts of money to fill his mouth with lumpy black goo.

Sometimes, however, it's not that easy. If you learn that

someone you care about enjoys something that you've been taught is weird or funny, or even wrong or sick, you may see that person in a whole new way. The gulf between you may seem uncrossable. You may even wonder if you ever knew that person in the first place.

Yet many people cross that gap every day. By learning more about whatever it is that their son, daughter, friend, parent, sibling or co-worker enjoys... by trusting that person's ability to make healthy choices... and, above all, by continuing to offer love, friendship and affection even when things seem confusing and weird and impossible... they discover deeper, truer connections than they ever had before. That is what we want for you, and why we wrote this book.



Many, many people in this world have sexual interests or practices that are in some way unusual. These people may enjoy bondage or spanking, erotic role-playing, dressing in special clothes that turn them on, or a host of other activities that place them outside the sexual mainstream. Your mechanic might have an alternative sexuality, or your librarian, or your kids' teacher, or your boss.

Any one of these people might enjoy alternative sex play occasionally, behind closed doors, for fun. Or they might do something considered "kinky" as their primary sexual expression. For some, their "kink" becomes a central part of their lives and their identity, so important to them that without it they'd be a different person. For a better idea of what this means, think about music: some people play a musical instrument occasionally for fun or relaxation, others play every day and consider their music an important part of their creative expression, and still others, if asked to describe themselves, would respond, "I'm a musician."

So if you count the full spectrum, ranging from those who experiment occasionally to those who identify strongly as kinky, you've got a *lot* of people. And each one has a constellation of people who care about him or her – mothers and fathers, siblings and friends, children, spouses and co-workers.

If someone you love has a sexual kink, or if you suspect that she may, and you want to know more about what that means to her and how you can deal with what it means to you, this book is for you.

How did you get this book? Perhaps someone you care about gave it to you, hoping to help you understand more about his life. This person must trust you a lot. Many kinky people have had sad and bitter experiences with people turning away from them once their sexuality becomes known. The person who gave you this book is hoping you won't do that. He loves you enough that he wants you to know some very important facts about his life, and he's probably crossing his fingers right now hoping that you'll still care about him after you've finished reading this.

Perhaps you bought this book yourself, because you know or suspect that someone you care about has a sexual kink. You may feel confused and ambivalent about what's going on in her life, maybe even worried about her safety or health, so you sought out this book as a way of helping you understand. Good for you!

Maybe you bought this book because you suspect that someone you care about has a kink, but you're not sure. Many kinky practices are rather trendy right now, so it can be hard to tell whether your friend or family member is just trying out a little "kink chic" as an experiment or for fun, or whether his kink is a long-term, deeply felt part of his central identity.

If you want to know, you'll have to ask him... and before he gives you a straight answer, he'll have to trust that you won't become angry or upset or refuse to hear about unusual sexual

practices. Showing him this book may help convince him that you want to hear about his life and that you can handle it. Maybe the two of you can read this book together.

No matter how you got this book, we want to reassure you of something very important. Your friend or relative is exactly the same person she was before you learned about her kink. All the things you love about her – her generosity of spirit, her affection toward you, her humor and her courage and her infectious laugh – are still just what they were before you found out about her sexual desires. Please keep that critically important fact in mind as you read on.

Who are we talking about? In this book, we're going to address the friends and family of people whose sexual *behaviors* are outside the mainstream, but we won't focus directly on issues of sexual orientation (homosexuality, bisexuality, heterosexuality) or gender identity (male-ness, femaleness, somewhere-in-betweenness).

In other words, when we say “kinky” on the cover of this book, we're not talking about what gender someone is or wants to be or wants to have sex with (although your kinky person may certainly also be gay, lesbian, bisexual and/or transgendered). There are already some excellent resources for the loved ones of gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered folk; we've listed some in the Resource Guide of this book.

We're also not going to directly address the families and friends of sex workers (prostitutes and other people who work in the sex industry). We'd love to see such a book published, but, unfortunately, we don't have the expertise to write it ourselves.

So the kinds of kinky people we'll talk about here are people whose desires and/or behavior include fetishism, crossdressing, bondage, spanking, sadomasochism, dominance and submission,

and erotic role-playing – either occasionally or as a lifestyle. If you're feeling confused by these terms, unsure even what we're talking about... don't worry, we'll explain everything as we go.

You may be feeling terrified, your head full of scary pictures of leather and whips and activities that you might only have heard whispered about. Let us reassure you – much of the far-out clothing and accessories you may have seen people wear are designed as turn-ons and recognition signals, but they can look pretty frightening to outsiders. None of the activities we're discussing in this book are as scary as your imagination might make them seem. Please take a deep breath, relax, turn off that overactive imagination if you can, and let us try to give you a better explanation of what's going on.

Why do you need to know this? You probably don't tell your kinky friend or relative what you did in bed last night, so you may be wondering why it's so important to him that you understand his sexual desires.

If you're heterosexual and not kinky, you are fortunate that the world you live in provides a place for you. People around you already pretty much understand your sexual needs and behaviors; you don't have to do a lot of explaining. Even if you enjoy an occasional walk on the wild side – a bit of bondage or role-playing – if you consider those activities to be a special treat or experiment and not part of your essential identity, you'll probably still fit in pretty comfortably.

Fitting in may not be so easy for your friend or family member. For many people (including your authors), our kink is central to our sense of who we are and where we fit into the world – as important as our gender or our race or our life-work or our marital status. Our kink places us, for better or worse, firmly on the margins of society, living always a little bit in a shadow. We often feel unsafe, never

totally sure who knows what about us (or who should). We put a lot of time and energy into building our own communities to provide us with support and safety and social connection. For us, when our sexual lifestyle is essential to our sense of identity, anybody who doesn't know about our kink doesn't really *know* us.

Imagine how it would feel to spend time with someone who likes you and cares about you and knows a whole lot about you, but doesn't know, and isn't *allowed* to know, that you're married (or a person of color, or a professional artist, or whatever). You can see how uncomfortable that would be, how you'd feel as though you were always lying just a little bit.

Do you really want your friend or relative to feel that way about you – to have to hide something that important to his identity and his life, and to always feel just a little bit on guard while talking to you? We hope not.

Where are you getting your information? Often, the friends and family of kinkyfolk have as their only source of information a lot of very sensationalized and inaccurate images put forth by television, movies, newspapers and so on. Please keep in mind that the people who create movies, television shows, novels and the like may know less about kink than you do – and that their job isn't to spread good information, it's to make money. In the old advertising phrase, "sex sells," and sensational sex sells even better. If all you get to hear about kink are such negative, exaggerated and inaccurate messages, then of course you'll believe that kinky people are screwed up and scary, and chances are you'll feel upset to learn that someone close to you is "one of *them*."

So where *do* you get reliable, non-sensationalized information? Well, that's what we aim to do in this book. We'll give you definitions of many terms you may not understand, and descriptions of what's actually involved in various kinks. The Resource Guide in

the back can point you toward more information about particular practices, and to good, well-researched, accurate books.

But your most important source of information is your kinky person herself. If you're feeling confused or uncertain about what she's trying to explain to you, don't turn to the National Enquirer or even your old college psychology textbook – ask her. Only she can tell you what she actually does, why she enjoys it, what she gets out of it, and how she keeps herself safe and happy while she does it. If you can't imagine yourself talking about such embarrassingly intimate stuff, this book will help you.

No apologies. Most of us grew up in a world where sex was a source of shame, and non-standard sex practically unspeakable. You may be accustomed to people who act guilty or ashamed about their sexual behaviors. If so, the tone of this book may seem a little unusual to you, because you're not going to read any apologies in here. We think that sex is wonderful, and that kinky sex is wonderful too, and that an interest in sex outside the mainstream is something to be proud of.

Proud? Of being perverted?? Well, yes. It is very difficult to come to terms with an alternative sexuality in a culture that teaches us that we are bad, sick, damaged and/or undesirable for wanting what we want. It's also difficult to find ways to enact “unacceptable” fantasies in a manner which is healthy, fun and consensual for everybody involved. We think any kinky person who has succeeded in doing these things has done something of which they – and you – should be very proud.

Your behavior has power. Kinky people often feel scared and isolated. Sometimes they may even hate themselves for “giving in” to a sexual kink that they know sets them apart from the rest of the world.

We're pretty sure you don't want anybody you care about to feel frightened, alone or self-hating. As someone who cares, you have a great deal of power to help or harm your friend or family member. Your behavior matters – it can help your kinky person to feel healthy, loved and accepted, or leave them feeling rejected, isolated and alone.

By reading even these first few pages, you've taken an important and positive step. THANK YOU!!!

Who are we and why should you listen to us? We're two middle-aged women living in the San Francisco Bay Area. Dossie is a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist who specializes in the needs of people who have unusual sexualities. Catherine is a writer and publisher. Between us, we've tried and enjoyed a lot of the kinks in this book, although we're best known as writers about, and practitioners of, S/M (sadomasochism) and polyamory (multipartner relationships). We're here to tell you what our world looks like from the inside.

We're both fortunate enough to be surrounded by people who care enough about us to accept all our kinks. Both of us are mothers of grown or near-grown children who are aware of our proclivities and comfortable with them. We're both also on good and honest terms with almost all of our families of origin, our co-workers and associates, and even our exes. And, yes, we both know how incredibly lucky we are.

We see ourselves as messengers from faraway places. We have traveled in forbidden territories where many others have not, and acted upon a great deal of what you may know only from stories and fantasies. We have explored territories inside ourselves and between each other that many people have forbidden themselves even to think about. These experiences have made us very *different*; we live in a different culture, with different assumptions, different rules,

different agreements, different boundaries...

Our hope in writing this book is that we may offer you information and answer questions about life on the fringes of sexual expression, increase your understanding and your tolerance so that you may, perhaps, feel more secure about your friends and family members who live in our world, or even have a clearer idea of what the consequences might be if you choose to travel here yourself. We also hope to pass along to you some of what we have learned on this bizarre journey, for how we love and how we play has brought us some knowledge and wisdom that can be found in this particular way.

This will be clearer later on. For now, we will strive to find the words to communicate to you both the joy the wisdom we have found, an expanded understanding of how we express ourselves and share sexual experience.

But we didn't want our voices to be the only ones you heard in this book. So we also asked as many people as we could contact to write "the letter you wouldn't dare send" – the letters they don't dare send to their parents, children, friends, siblings or spouses, explaining their kinks and asking for acceptance. Some are funny, some angry, some sad, some loving.

We have scattered these letters throughout the book, to give you an idea of the thoughts and wishes of kinky people everywhere, and to help you understand what your kinky person might want you to know.

Dear Mom,

I just wanted to tell you how wonderful it was having you out here for the holidays. I really am glad to see that we have reached a point in our relationship where we can talk about things in the past without anger and pain.

You have always called me the untamed soul of the family. I know I have not been easy at times to deal with. I am stubborn, rebellious and I have never accepted the phrase, "Well, that's just the way we have always done it."

As I sit back and reflect I think that all the things I got into as I was growing up was just a way for a part of me to get out. A part that until recently I was not willing to admit was real. However, through hours of soul searching and exploration I discovered it is very real. I am a masochist. Even more than that, I am a submissive masochist. I am not sure what that will mean to you. Most think of stereotypes from Hollywood. What it means to me is that I get greater sense of self through the use of pain.

There are lots of ways to do this, many in society do it everyday. Look at long distance runners. They run themselves to the brink of near exhaustion and hit the famous wall. After that the endorphins kick in and they describe it as flying. Look at football players, or soccer players, or any sport. All involve a certain amount of strain, and physical contact. Look at sky-divers, racecar drivers, and other thrill seekers. Look what they do with their bodies to achieve that natural high.

Mom, you know me. I am not weak. I am not stupid. I was not ever abused as a child and I have had a wonderful, loving relationship with you and dad. It is not something that was done to me, it is more something that has always been a part of me that I had no idea how to explore and express. I was always restless. I always wanted bigger, faster thrills.

Remember the time we camped at Lake Whitney when I was ten? We had camped right on the high cliffs. My older brothers and cousins were jumping off the cliffs into the lake below. I don't know how far down it was to the water, but I do remember that it both thrilled and frightened me. I begged you to let me do it. You told me no, it was too dangerous. Finally, when you went into the camper, dad told me I could go. I ran from that spot. I didn't want you to come out and say no. I hit the edge without slowing down and jumped up and out with all the force I could muster. I remember the hot sun on me, the bright shine on the water, the rush of blood in my ears. I can still feel that brief moment when my body was caught between the momentum of my jump and the never-ending pull of gravity. It was blissful. Finally my body surrendered to the greater force and I came plunging down into the cool lake. The moment I hit the water was disorienting. At first I did not know what to do. My senses were stunned. The rush of bubbles in the water was like a

roar in my ears. With great effort I forced my body into action and made it back up to the surface and took in the sweetest breath I have ever had. That is the closest way I can describe what happens to me now. After a good scene, my senses are stunned. I feel a little high. Everything I see and touch is somehow more wondrous.

I have become involved with a local community of alternate lifestyles. Here I have met many different people from many different backgrounds that all have come to the same or similar conclusions. We are different but we are not evil. We are many, but society will never accept us.

During this time I have met and become attached to the most wonderful man ever. Not the typical bad boys I always seemed to latch onto as a kid. This is a man who is both loving and supportive. He encourages me to do all the things that make me a whole person. Not like the ex-husband that only wanted me to meet his need for a mother. With this man I have learned how to trust others, how to better trust myself. I have improved my ability to communicate my needs, which is the first step to getting them met.

Mom, I am not sure how you will feel about what I am telling you. All I know is that for the first time, I feel whole. I feel like I understand my desires and myself. I feel at peace with who and what I am. That restless soul is content now.

We have been through a lot with each other. I am not telling you this to cause you any pain or discomfort. I just felt that you should know. It is somewhat like being gay, I suppose. This is what I am. I know it, have known it for two years. Now I embrace it. However, it must be a shock to you. There is a clear difference between this and abuse. Everything I do is safe, sane and consensual. I am not being led astray, I am following my natural and normal urges.

I know you will have questions. I will do my best to answer them. All I ask is that you not judge me by what society thinks I am. Judge me instead by the person you know I am.

I love you,

K

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What Are You Feeling Now?

Learning that someone you care about has a sexual kink isn't like finding out that they like their cheeseburgers with onions, or that they're going to Disney World for their next vacation. While your situation may not be as terrifying or upsetting as it *seems* right now, how you *feel* about it is important: it can affect how you see your friend or relative, her relationships, and her place in the world.

Here are some thoughts or feelings we have heard from our own friends and relatives:

Some people feel scared: "What if he gets hurt?" "Doesn't she know there are diseases out there?"

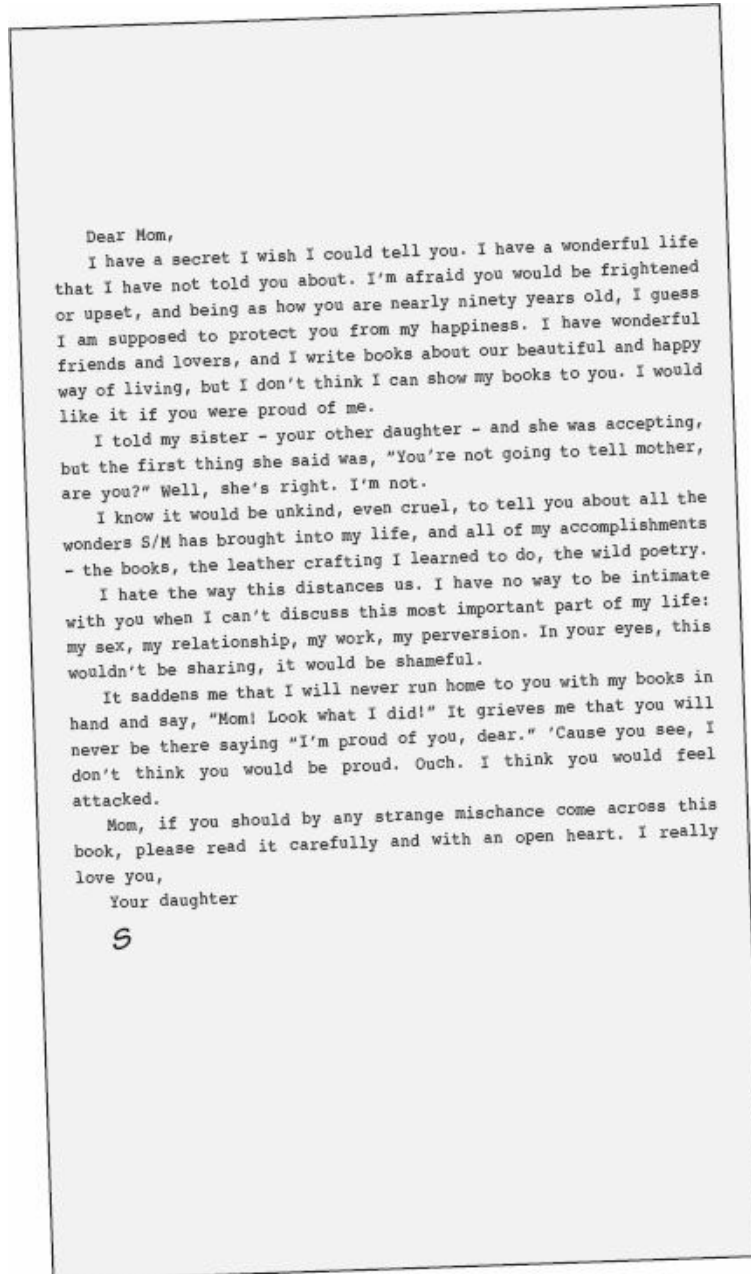
Others feel guilty: "What did I do to make him this way?" "Is this because I spanked her when she was little?" "If only I'd been more loving..."

Or angry: "How dare she tell me this!" "That selfish jerk!"

Or puzzled: "I thought I knew her... now I feel as if I don't know her at all." "How could *anybody* enjoy stuff like that?!"

Others just feel sort of panicky, heads swimming with sensationalistic images from magazines or television. (Trying to

imagine your middle-aged mother in leather and thigh-high boots, for example, is a surefire recipe for overload, as our children will happily assure you.)



These are all very difficult emotions; this book will help you understand and deal with them soon. But in the meantime, if you're feeling one or more of them, we suggest you be very good to yourself. It is completely understandable that you're feeling what

you're feeling.

Maybe you already know some good coping mechanisms for when you're feeling tense or upset. If so, keep them in mind as you read on. If you find yourself feeling uncomfortably strong emotions, please feel free to set the book aside while you take care of yourself.

If you find that your usual coping mechanisms aren't enough, let us suggest some techniques that work well for us. Take a minute to connect with yourself physically. Where are you feeling the tension? Is your forehead all knotted up? Does your throat hurt? Are your shoulders up around your ears? Is your stomach upset? Are you clenching your fists? Oh, yes... and when was the last time you breathed?

If the tension feels too uncomfortable, please stick a bookmark in this page and put the book down for a moment. Sit back in your chair and close your eyes. Breathe deeply. Try to breathe warm, relaxing breaths into the part of you that feels tense. Imagine breathing out stress and tension and any unwelcome thoughts. Think about something pleasant – perhaps the last time you had a really nice time with your friend or relative, how much you care about them, how good they've been to you. Or, if that seems too difficult right now, just think about an image that soothes you and relaxes you – flowers, rolling waves, your favorite leisure occupation.

When you feel your breathing become slower and easier, and the tension has at least started to ease up, it will be time to pick the book up again. Take your time.

Before you read any farther, we want to ask you to remember some other time in your life when you got a piece of news that seemed frightening or overwhelming or infuriating – but that later turned out to be not such a big deal, or maybe even turned out to be *good news*.

Please keep that time in mind as you read on, because we

suspect that what you're learning about your friend or relative will not turn out to be a disaster, but rather a form of knowing each other better that will bring you closer and help you build a truer, more loving picture of the person you already love and care about.

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About the Language in This Book

Kinky people, like any other small and insular community, tend to develop their own ways of speaking – not just terminology and jargon, but whole new ways of expressing themselves. While we’ve done our best to be comprehensible in this book, we do want to mention a couple of points that may come up for you as you read it, or as you talk to your kinky friend or relative. After all, we can’t talk to each other without a common language.

Gender. Gender tends to be a lot more flexible in the kink communities, and just because the person you’re talking to looks male to you doesn’t mean that s/he feels male or that s/he’ll look male tomorrow. Kinkyfolk are often more comfortable than others with breaching conventional gender boundaries – you may see a gay man partnered with a bisexual woman, or a heterosexual man enthusiastically spanking a man in drag, or a pair of lesbians looking and acting like gay men as they rev their big motorcycles.

Many kinkyfolk have a great interest in exploring the meaning of gender and discovering what lies beyond conventional feelings about gender – so much so that in some kink communities, notably

on the Internet, the genderless pronouns “sie” (for “she or he”) and “hir” (for “his or her”) are in frequent use.

We’re not quite ready for those pronouns yet, and you’re probably not either. We’re also uncomfortable with the use of “they” as a synonym for “he or she.” Instead, what we’ve done throughout this book is to refer to your kinky person as “she” in one section and “he” in the next, in pursuit of inclusivity. Please feel free to translate to the gender of your choice.

How to talk about sex? Most of us were brought up in a world where the only “nice” words to use about sex were the ones in a biology or psychology textbook, or nursery euphemisms like “down there.”

Kinky people have found that this linguistic shyness can represent a major barrier to getting our needs met – how can we ask for what we want when we don’t have the words to describe it?

As a result, we have learned to use language that you may find overly blunt or perhaps even obscene. It isn’t that we’re trying to shock or upset you when we talk like this, it’s just that it’s the only kind of language that works for us among ourselves, and sometimes we forget to stop using it when we’re talking to you. (If you see words that you don’t understand, the Glossary in back might be able to help.)

On a related note, we also have developed language (as well as clothing and other symbols) that express our fantasies, the roles we enjoy playing together and the things we’d like to do. We sometimes forget how that language sounds to outsiders. Catherine recently told a reporter that she liked to be “mean and cruel,” then felt a little embarrassed when he called her back for clarification and she had to explain that what she liked was to *pretend* to be mean and cruel for her own and her partner’s mutual pleasure.

If you find yourself repeatedly having trouble with the language

in this book, or with the language you encounter in conversation with your kinky friend or relative, here's a good exercise. Sit down all by yourself, sometime when you know you won't be interrupted, with a big piece of paper. On it, write down everything you've ever thought of or heard about or imagined that people could do sexually. These don't have to be the words you usually use, or the sexual behaviors you yourself enjoy – use all the “dirty” words you've ever encountered, and write down everything you can think of. If you're not sure whether or not it belongs on the list, write it down anyway. Nobody but you will ever see this list – you can shred it or burn it when you're done.

Then read the words aloud to yourself. Start quietly if you feel shy, then try to build up to your normal speaking voice. How does that feel? Do you become a bit more comfortable with practice? We hope so.

As we say, we've done our best in this book to speak to you in language with which most people will be reasonably comfortable. But if we use words that make you turn white and want to cover your eyes, we apologize in advance. And we hope you'll take a deep breath, and go on reading.

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On Kink

What does it mean to be kinky? Perhaps we first need to ask: what does it mean to be normal? Many people believe that there is some single form of sexual expression that is “normal,” and that all other forms of sex are immoral, inferior, pathological, destructive to one’s health or relationships, or ultimately unfulfilling.

According to the “normal” assumption, successful sex means potentially reproductive intercourse between a man and a woman, preferably married, who plan to have children and stay together in a monogamous relationship for the rest of their lives. Some believe that even within these stringent boundaries, sex is only okay if the man is on top and if both partners reach orgasm at the same time without other sources of stimulation like fingers or vibrators. (Sex therapists call this requirement “Look Ma, no hands!”) Such a limited approach to sex actually satisfies only a very small percentage of people – so by that standard, “normal” sex is actually a statistical abnormality.

According to the statistics that Alfred Kinsey and his colleagues collected in the forties, the average couple has sex two or three

times a week, with varying amounts of foreplay culminating in intercourse that lasts for an average of one point seven five minutes.¹ That's one hundred and five seconds. If this is "normal," most people we've talked to are striving to be "abnormal."

Here in California, all forms of sex except the reproductive were illegal until the "consenting adults" act was passed in 1976. In many other states, "sodomy" laws still outlaw sexual variation. When Dossie was first a sex educator, she used to have to advise people that commonplace pleasurable activities like oral sex were illegal, despite that fact that many people find such pleasures to be a vital, often necessary, part of their sex lives.

Imagine a world in which something as simple as pleasuring your partner with your mouth could lead to a jail term! Thinking about the prejudices that may have made *your* sex life illegal can give you a sense of what it feels like to be told you should give up whatever it is that makes your sex exciting, intimate and fulfilling.

We believe that each individual has a right to reach out for whatever kinds of consensual sex and love are fulfilling to him – because people are different, and are turned on by different things, and because sexual satisfaction is truly an important part of how we love each other and how we feel good about ourselves. We believe that the freedom to explore our sexual natures is an intrinsic part of our right to the pursuit of happiness.

Are kinky people a small minority? It is probably true that people who act on their desires for unusual pleasures and who incorporate kink openly in their relationships are a minority, even though, as we said above, everybody is probably "abnormal" to some extent or other. But in our fantasies, as expressed in art, novels, fairy tales, and much of our culture from high art to Hollywood, there is a whole lot of kink.

One of the sexiest things we read in high school was Yeats's

poem Leda and the Swan, a perverse tale of rape and bestiality based on a story that has fascinated artists for millennia. Most of us can readily see the eroticism of a Venus in Furs, or Count Dracula, or the Wild Ones on motorcycles (wearing *really* hot leather) that were the sex symbols of the uptight fifties. A lot of the images that raise our adrenaline and turn us on in contemporary movies and television are explorations of the eroticism of power, of pain, of medical or uniform or leather fetishes, of prisoners and fugitives, helplessness and wicked power, victims and villains.

Dear Mom & Dad:

This morning I was picking out the jewelry I wanted to wear for Mother's Day Brunch. I have some pretty good stuff. If I wanted to, I could pass for an upper-middle-class housewife. Anyone looking at me would probably think that I'd done well by myself; I'm a plain-looking, straight-haired, Jewish American Princess. Or at least a former princess; I think they rescind that title after you get married and hit thirty. I could also choose to present myself as a long-term resident of a trailer court. Which one is me? Which the hell one is me?

We're going to the in-laws' country club. When there's a celebration to be had, it happens at "the club." I don't really have a problem with that. I just wish I didn't feel so different from the other people there. I guess I could wear the usual stuff: the rather chunky diamond wedding ring, with earrings that match, and maybe one of the bracelets I've accumulated. The heavy gold chain I like, that goes with the necklace... no, that would be too much, garish; only the goyim do that.

I'd like to wear some of the pieces that remind me of what I'd wear when I'm on my own, but no, we're supposed to outgrow enjoying freaking people out; let's not be tacky. God, no. There's definitely no way that I could wear the pieces that I really get a kick out of. No colorful junk, heavy buckles or cheap chains. No black nail polish.

For myself, I just bought a corset. Stupid piece of indulgence, really. No one wears corsets any more, where am I going to be able to wear it? Well, Ma, this Saturday, I'm going to a party, where, if I wear that corset and nothing else, I'll be overdressed. But I'm going to go beyond that - I'll also be wearing a collar, locked around my neck. Every now and then, at a given signal, I'll duck out of a conversation I'm having with someone really interesting, to go fetch a Coke. Not for me; I drink diet Pepsi. This is for my Master.

See, I like some of the things you think are tacky, revolting, or downright dangerous and wrong. Like them? No, it's more that I can't live without them. The corset is uncomfortable. It compresses everything from right about here to right about there. Yes, it hurts. But... I like being hurt. When I have sex, I have to be hurt, or I can't get off. I'm bored. But hurt me, and it's a whole different story. I usually have to be tied down for all this, and that by itself is just fine. And the feeling I get when I kneel in front of my master is a whole world away from what most people would call "sex," but then, I consider them deprived.

Most of the "people of quality" I've met seem to live their lives without much passion at all. From what I see of them, I'd guess that if they had had sex recently, it sure couldn't have been terribly memorable! Of course, really classy people don't show such

things, you'd say. I wish I could be happy living that way - I sure tried; but I failed, sadly.

I hang out with people who wear nothing to parties. I think they look great. Big, heavy women, and men in leather pants, and really slutty-looking girls wearing the stuff out of Frederick's of Hollywood's close-out page. People with so many piercings you'd wonder how they found the space for them all - and at that, you probably aren't seeing them all! Really awful people, except that some of them are doctors, lawyers, financial analysts, and - horror of horrors! - car salesmen. And each and every one of them is kinky or perverted, just like me.

I party with people who like being hurt, just like me. We show off our bruised butts and tweaked nipples, and we all share in the memories of what it feels like to get those bruises and tweaks. Fond, warm memories, that we can enjoy together, in a kind of sexual empathy that the folks in the suits and ties will never experience. We tell great jokes about each other, and the wonderful people who are so kind as to do the bruising for us - those men and women in leather over there.

Please, for just one minute, see beyond the leather, the attitudes, the posturing, the sleazy clothes. See me. Just me. I'm still the same person - you just know something about me now that you didn't a minute ago. Knowing that, have I become sleazy? No, please; let's make it the other way around - please realize that I'm not sleazy, and neither are my friends, my people, no matter how many earrings we're wearing.

I can still pass, when we're in public, if you want me to. I don't have to shove my sexual style in your face, and I don't have to burden you with the details that excite me so much. But if you ask me to hide it, be aware that you're asking me to shut away a terribly important part of me, and that the strain of keeping it under my Dior wraps is going to make me a little bitter, a little uptight, a little resentful. I'll be in a hurry to get away and get back to the people who accept - and love - me for who I am, and not how well I show in polite society.

All these years of being embarrassed about the things that turn me on. We've always been so close; even writing this out, I keep wanting to fax it to you and have you read it over! I'm still too embarrassed - there's just no way I could take the chance on you actually seeing this. I don't want therapy. I don't want to be fixed - I'm not broken. I just want you to see the same stars I see, or at least to accept that I can see them, and that I want to be free to live among them sometimes. If they leave marks on me you'll know - they look like chains, leather, cheap rings and heavy bracelets. The ones you find in the bottom drawer of my jewelry box.

Love,

L

We often wonder how many people would join sexual "minorities" if it weren't so terribly against the rules to be a pervert.

One useful way to see how S/M and other kinkiness fit into the whole spectrum of people and sex is to compare our sexual preferences with the way we choose how we eat. Some people want to eat familiar food - what Mom used to cook feels most satisfying. Others seek out exotic foods from distant parts of the world. Still

others choose fast food, and like to get their needs met without a lot of fuss. Others want health food, as natural as possible, to celebrate in their diet a oneness with nature. Gourmets invest a lot of attention into what they eat, collect specialized kitchen equipment, go to fancy restaurants, seek out obscure and rare ingredients, spend a lot of time perfecting a particular taste. Truth is, all of these forms of nourishment are just fine, and there is no reason to think that a *Tarte aux Demoiselles Tatin* is any more or less satisfying than Mom's apple pie.

Yet we often make judgments about other people's preferences: gourmets may find traditionalists too conservative, traditionalists might think that gourmets are decadent and waste too much time and money on eating. Natural food fanciers are often disdained as "health nuts." But in food, as in sex, there is really no reason not to honor each other's choices, and celebrate the joy we all take in our sex lives (and our nourishment) without labeling anybody less than okay. All our pleasures are brilliant.

Is kink sick? Can it be healthy? In the nineteenth century, psychologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing wrote Psychopathia Sexualis, a sort of encyclopedia of sexual deviation in which he coined the words sadism and masochism, and attempted to describe sexual variation as he observed it in a Victorian mental asylum. Of course, all the people he observed were mentally ill, so he assumed that the sexual behaviors he observed in this population were either a symptom or a cause of their mental illness. He never asked any functional people about their sex lives.

It is to Krafft-Ebing that we owe the idea that masturbating can make you crazy, since he observed that 98% of the inmates masturbated; he never thought to inquire about the private pleasures of psychologists.

Freud went on to link mental health to sexual development,

theorizing that mental problems derive from arrested sexual development. Since he believed that truly healthy people would grow up to enjoy missionary position sex in marriage and nothing else, he assumed that variations in sexual practice that he observed were caused by arrested development, and thus, again, were symptoms of psychological disturbance.

These are circular arguments, based on the belief that when we see something we don't understand, there must be something wrong in the works somewhere.

For many centuries before the Victorian psychologists, we ostracized sexual explorers as demons and witches. In the nineteenth century we began to justify these superstitions as medical science. The authors of this book see all attempts to link psychological pathology with nondestructive sexual practices as modern fairy tales, mythologies that doom us all to worry that something is wrong with our sexual delights.

The best way to tell if someone is mentally ill or psychologically disturbed is to look at her functioning. Does this person have a way to make a living? Does she maintain a home, a family, relationships, friends? A healthy, functioning person is most likely just that, regardless of how wild and unfamiliar her sexual practices may be.

Sex addiction? Some people believe that what they consider an inordinate interest in sex is a symptom of addiction. Of course, how much interest in sex is “too much” is a question no one can really answer – again, we propose the functional definition, that too much interest in sex is when your sexual practice or fantasies are making your life unmanageable. In other words, no matter how outlandish a person's sex life may seem to the outside observer, if it is not broken, there's no need to fix it.

Friends and family,

I like to get spanked. My partner does, too. I am telling you this so that you can better understand me, my partner and our other friends. My enjoyment of this kink is an important part of my life. I can't possibly begin to share with you the physical sensations involved or the emotional dynamics of the relationship. I can only tell you what it means to me.

Spanking, bondage, and exploring dominance and submission roles in my sexual relationship with my partner are essential facets of our intimacy. They are expressions of love and trust. We would still have a complete relationship without these things, but it would not seem so full.

There is nothing that "happened" to me as a child or at any other time to "make" me feel this way and there is no reason to feel that there is anything wrong. My partner and I have agreed on our limitations. We believe in practicing our kink in a sane, safe, and consensual manner. We make every effort to make sure that everything that we do together is mutually fulfilling, safe and not motivated by any ghost from the past.

Life is very good to us.

H

Sexual concerns, sexual dysfunction and sex addiction all do really exist, and bring great distress to those who experience them. Sex addiction is characterized by compulsively engaging in sex that has negative consequences, or by using sex for the wrong reasons: to shore up flagging self-esteem, or soothe anxiety, or as a sort of fast-food substitute for genuine emotional connection with another person. Treatment is available for sexual problems through sex

therapy or twelve-step support groups. However, it's important to understand that sex addiction or other problems can manifest themselves in any form of sexual expression, from the missionary position onwards. Addiction has nothing whatever to do with the form of sex, kinky or otherwise, that the individual prefers.

Why are some people kinky? Nobody knows. Why are you the way you are? There are no statistics that connect S/M or kinkiness to a personal history of child abuse or molestation, or any other traumatic experiences. Kinky people are found in all walks of life, in as much variation as there are people.

Parents often worry about this question, wondering “what did I do wrong?” If your child is kinky, you probably did nothing wrong. Maybe you even did something right: we consider the capacity for sexual exploration to be a symptom of a healthy attitude.

Can kinky people be cured? Why would anyone want to? If people are happy with their lives, then presumably they don't want to change. It is, however, difficult to live in a society that does not accept the way you express your love and your sexiness. We have known people who have been forced to choose between their kinkiness and their marriages, or their children, or their families of origin, and we feel deep compassion for such a dilemma.

Most of the kinky folk we know feel that their sex lives are so important, so valuable to them that it would be a tragedy to have to give up their most intimate and profound sexual experiences to satisfy a society that hates them. This book is our attempt to change society, to generate more tolerance so fewer of us will be forced to make such impossible choices.

Once you start can you ever stop? Again, why would anyone want to? A common fear about kinky practices is that once you start realizing your fantasies in your sexual relationships you can never

go back, and you will never be satisfied with the sex you used to enjoy. Actually, most kinky people do enjoy nonkinky or “vanilla” sex. The term “vanilla sex” was coined by a leatherman to describe the pleasure he took in standard sex, because we all know that vanilla is one of the very best flavors. This term was never intended as an insult to non-perverts.

There is a myth that kinky people can only get off on a strictly limited form of sex that specifically and in every detail matches their one particular fantasy. In fact, most kinky people develop a large and varied repertoire of sexual delights. It stands to reason that if you tell your special fantasy to another in the hopes of acting it out together, that other person will share *her* particular fantasy, which will probably be different, so now you are playing two fantasies, and maybe you hear about another fantasy that you both think would be neat to try... and so over time the sexual explorer learns a whole lot of sensations to explore, roles to try on and fantasies to play out.

There are kinky individuals, usually inexperienced, who believe that the only thing that will work for them is to find one particular person who wants to do this one particular fantasy down to the last detail. Such people have a hard time finding partners, and would-be partners may resent their single-mindedness and unwillingness to explore their partners’ desires. Such “fixation” is readily fixed by trying out a variety of sexual pleasures and discovering that lots of sex acts are delightful and pleasurable and satisfying, and that bits and pieces of whatever made the original fantasy so wonderful can be integrated into many different activities.

Sexual behavior is learned. You learned what you know about enjoying sex now from somewhere, so of course you can learn more and different ways to express and enjoy sexuality. This is true for vanilla and kinky people alike. We strongly recommend that we all

see ourselves as young or old dogs with an infinite capacity for learning new tricks. Increasing your repertoire has the advantage that you don't have to give up enjoying what you already like: it is always easier to add new behaviors than to deny your deepest desires.

What about morality? We have all been taught that there is a morality to sex, that certain sex acts are right, others wrong, that many forms of sexual pleasure constitute sins against God, society, your partner or yourself. Many established religions preach that only a very limited range of sexual expression is acceptable from a spiritual point of view: that celibacy, or as little sex as possible, is somehow holier or more pleasing to God. Some religions teach that sex is original sin and the source of all evil. Because European-American culture is pervaded by its religious origins, as a culture we tend to believe that sexual exploration and spiritual development are somehow opposed to each other, that more of one necessarily means less of the other.

Your authors believe that the morality of sexual behavior between consenting adults has nothing to do with how outrageously we express our sexuality, or with how many people. Our morality resides in how we treat those people, whether we treat the people around us with respect and honesty, or whether we use other people for our pleasure or aggrandizement with no regard for their feelings or any harm that might come to them.

Furthermore, our personal experience shows us that many kinky people are very active in churches and spiritual practice, and that sexual exploration frequently leads to increased interest in spiritual connection. We believe that an enlightened sexuality can be a high expression of the human spirit. One whole branch of yoga study, called tantra, is among other things an exploration of how to attain spiritual growth and insight through personal intimacy and sexual

practice.

Dear Mom and Dad,

This might surprise you, and then again, it probably won't. You've always known I was "different," always thought I chose bossy, arrogant men who were beneath me, always thought I just lacked the common sense to find a good decent man to settle down with. And then I did. And you loved him. And I thought I loved him, too. Unfortunately, he turned out to be not so decent, as you've recently discovered.

But it took a long time for you to see that - to see the abuse that went on. And it hurt me so much that you sided with him when I left him. It hurt me so much to lose my family for so long. It's only recently, since I came home, that you've understood what I tried to explain to you. For that, I am eternally grateful.

The one thing you both noticed, after having not seen me in three years, was my new sense of self-esteem. You both commented on how much higher I carried myself, how much happier I seemed, how much more settled. I was pleased that you noticed, and when Mom asked me why, I just hemmed and hawed about M., and his kids, and how being part of his family had forced me to grow up.

But there's more to it than that. And it's time for me to explain it to you.

Just as you knew I was different, I knew I was different, too. I couldn't put my finger on it for the longest time, but I knew there was something deeply rooted inside me, seeking daylight. It wasn't until I was 27 years old that I found the answers, unlocked that door, opened myself to what it was I was meant to be.

I'm kinky.

I can see the wheels of your minds turning, from two thousand miles away. Please stop them for awhile, and let me explain.

I wanted something. I wanted someone to want me - not just be satisfied with me as a partner, as my ex-husband was - not someone who needed me - but someone who wanted me. I found that, in BDSM.

BDSM means many things. It means bondage, dominance, discipline, submission, sadomasochism. It means that people tie each other up, and sometimes hit each other with paddles and whips. It means that one person tells the other person what to do. Kinda like marriage in the '50s, but then again, not.

Finding this, and opening that final door on my reality, has been a release for me. It's opened me up to all the possibilities of the world. It's made me a smarter, stronger person, because it's allowed me to grow. It's given me many rewards, many lessons, and many trials. I am constantly discovering things within myself that I was afraid to discover before. I now have the courage and the strength to be honest with myself, and those around me.

I can see Mom crying. And I can see Dad crying too. Please don't. Please let me finish.

You'll have questions, when this all sinks in. You'll have questions for your daughter the pervert. Questions about how you went wrong in raising me - questions about who could have possibly sexually abused me as a child, and made me this way - questions about that sort of thing. Let me try and answer some of them now.

I wasn't sexually abused as a child. I didn't lose my virginity until I was sixteen - I don't think either of you know that. No one made me this way - I just am this way. And I'm not ashamed of it, and I pray that you won't be ashamed of me either - not now - not after it took me so long to get you back into my life.

You'll want to know if M. hits me. Well, yes, he does. But I hit him sometimes too. Sometimes I am on top, and sometimes he is on top, and sometimes, we're both on top and someone else is on the bottom. Sometimes, he tops someone else. Sometimes, I top someone else. Sometimes, one of us bottoms to someone else. So yes, it's true, we aren't monoga-mous either. And no, we aren't going to get married. But yes, we do love each other with all the love in our hearts. And we intend to stay together for a very long time. I know you're worried about that, because you liked him so much when I brought him home, but please don't. There is no danger to our relationship. If anything, it has grown inexplicably close because of the love, respect and trust we have in each other... because we're kinky.

I realize this is a lot to absorb. And I'm sorry that I couldn't have told you in person. But you know why I couldn't. You know that I can't stand to see either of you cry. I don't want to be the cause of any more pain to either of you, so I pray that this letter does not bring you pain, but brings you to an understanding of who your youngest daughter is.

Who is she?

Same J. she always was. Tall and long-haired. Green-eyed and smart. Computer and writing talented. Career girl. Spiritual. Sensitive, open, loving, warm and loyal. I am, as always, the product of you - and your love for each other.

I know in my heart that you won't understand this. And I accept that after reading this, we may not speak for some time. As much as it pains me, I accept that risk, knowing that if you only know half of your daughter, you may as well not know her at all.

Know that your daughter is happy in her life. As she's never been so before. And know that your daughter adores you. Always know that. Please always know that.

For my Catholic soul, I pray you will understand.

Your daughter,

J.

Exploration of an expanded sexuality requires a very high regard for ethics. Since there aren't really any standardized rules to follow, we must always have respect and consideration for every person who may be affected by our actions. Meeting this goal requires a very high standard of consent (which we will discuss further in Chapter Six). Many of us, maybe you too, grew up in a culture where if someone didn't say an outright "no" to sex, they were

assumed to have consented. Kinky sexuality sets the standard for consent a bit higher – it isn't enough not to say “no,” everybody involved must say an affirmative “yes” to whatever sexual pleasures are being proposed. To do so, of course, they must have a clear understanding of their own and their partner's desires and limits, which involves a very high level of self-awareness.

From our own experience, we can state that we have seen a level of ethics within the kink communities that is at least as high as we've seen outside them. But we don't expect you to rely on our experiences in thinking about the morality of kink. Instead, it may be easier to start with a simpler way to satisfy yourself about the morality of any sexuality you may observe or hear about: is anybody being harmed? Is everyone involved treated with respect and with regard for their well-being?

We believe that sexual ethics mandate consent, which we define as “an active collaboration for the pleasure and well-being of everyone concerned.” So even if your kinky person is doing things that you may have been taught are wrong, we hope you can open your heart to see that this fundamental ethical tenet is being met, even if the way it's being met may look very strange to you right now.

⁴ Kinsey, *Male Sexual Behavior*, “p. 580.

5

What Do Kinky People Actually Do?

In this part of the book, we're going to talk a bit about the kinds of behaviors that actually get labeled "kinky" in our culture. As you read it, we'd like you to give yourself permission to have some uncomfortable feelings. You may think that the activities we're describing are gross, or scary, or silly, or shocking. It's fine to have such feelings – recognize them, acknowledge them, accept that not everybody shares them, and move onward for now.

We don't want you to beat yourself up because the behaviors we're describing don't turn you on. Some of them don't turn us on either. We've never yet met anybody who enjoys every single possible alternative sexual behavior – some people like many of them, some like a few, some like only one, and some none. Whatever your own consensual sexual turn-ons may be, they're fine with us, and we want them to be fine with you too.

The first thing to understand is that kinky behavior is nowhere near as scary as it looks. The whole point is to feel scary and be safe, like on a roller coaster or in a horror movie – to get the thrill without much actual danger. So kinky people may wear intimidating

costumes, or jingle with piercings that make you cringe, or build playrooms in their basements modeled on the dungeons of the Inquisition: all this is theater, setting the atmosphere for thrills and chills.

As you try to understand a kinky behavior, it can be tempting to compare it with an experience of your own that evokes fear or discomfort. If your husband likes to be spanked, for example, you may mentally be comparing that with your own experience of being spanked as a child, with all the sense of punishment and shame and outrage that goes with a nonconsensual spanking. We've tried both, and assure you that these are very different experiences – apples and oranges. Safety comfort, and deliberate sensuality make a kinky spanking a lot more fun... but if a nonconsensual childhood spanking is all you know about spanking, it's no wonder you may have trouble understanding what could be such a turn-on in that!

No two people experience the same stimulus exactly the same; we're all wired differently. It's quite true that a stimulus experienced consensually and in a negotiated way feels entirely different from the same stimulus experienced in an atmosphere of emotional stress and/or nonconsent. Please remember that you really can't know what an unusual sexual behavior might feel like unless you've tried it yourself – and even then, there's no guarantee that what you feel is the same as what someone else might feel.

One friend of ours remembers: “I was often spanked hard with a belt when I was a child, so I was very hesitant to try any kind of spanking or whipping play. But the first time I did allow myself to be whipped, it was with a belt, and I was amazed. It felt nothing like what I had remembered from my childhood. It wasn't scary at all (well, at least not once we got started), and it didn't feel ‘painful,’ at least not in the usual sense of the word. It felt warm, and entrancing, and very, very sexy.”

The joy of immobility. Many kinkyfolk like giving or receiving a sensation of enforced helplessness using various kinds of bondage. This is probably one of the commonest kinks – some pollsters estimate that over a fourth of adult Americans have at least experimented with bondage – and also one of the easiest for many people to accept. If popular culture is any indication, it must also be a turn-on to an awful lot of people – no spy thriller or Western is complete without a portrayal of the curvaceous heroine struggling nobly against her bonds. One of our good kinky friends remembers his first sexual stirrings taking place in the early fifties, upon viewing a picture of Dale Evans tied up within the pages of his Roy Rogers comic book.

Dear Friend,

What madness inspired you to do an Internet search on my name? I'm sorry you were surprised to find that I have been posting for years to groups like [soc.subculture.bondage-bdsm](#), but I'm glad you let me know, so I have a chance to tell you what it is really like. It feels normal.

It isn't old men in dodgy raincoats taking advantage of bored fallen women. It isn't full of ice-pick wielders driven psychotic by childhood abuse. It is a bunch of people from all walks of life meeting to have fun.

You'll find a lot of science fiction fans are into BDSM. Both communities value tolerance and perhaps the illicit feeling of shocking society. But is what we do really so bad? Let me describe one scene I saw:

Three women and two men gathered naked in the center of a salt circle. They hugged, and proceeded to carefully insert needles through their nipples. By attaching wire to these needles, they made a pentagram, each celebrant connected to two others. Then they started to dance.

Sounds serious, doesn't it? Dangerous, twisted, possibly satanic? You must be kidding. These people were having fun! Have you ever seen someone trying to pluck a tune out on a wire, getting different notes by varying the tension? They nearly fell over a couple of times because they were laughing too hard. The notes kept being drowned out by "Ouch (giggle). Kate, your left breast is not in tune... it's too taut. Think of accounting or something." I asked one of them later which part hurt the most. After careful consideration, he replied that it was stubbing his toe, although the comments on his musicianship came a close second.

I won't try to explain here how pain can sometimes feel good, or why "safe, sane and consensual" are the watchwords that BDSMers play by. There are web pages and books that do that far better than I could. If you want to find out more, ask me anything you like, and I'll do my best to answer, or refer you to a more knowledgeable source.

But until then, there is one thing I would ask you to do. You have known me for many years, and if there is a disparity between the impression you have gained of my character, and the image you have gained of BDSM from those who are not themselves participants, please bear in mind the amount of misinformation that gathers about taboo subjects, such as the common view of homosexuality a generation ago.

I remain the same, as I always have been,
your friend,

D

Bondage is a turn-on for a number of reasons. When someone is in bondage, there's no question about which partner is the active party and which is the recipient – the bondage clarifies the roles and relieves the anxiety of wondering "is it okay to just lie here or should I be doing something?" Bondage increases helplessness – a very sexy sensation for people who are turned on to consensually giving up or taking power.

Bondage involves technical skill: if you have tried playing tie-up, you have probably discovered that it takes a lot of forethought to avoid uncomfortable stretches in the shoulders and thighs, and to prevent unwanted tingling or numbness. Bondage equipment is usually designed to look scary – black leather and all that – while being utterly and completely comfortable. Wrist and ankle cuffs are padded or lined with fur to prevent chafing, and are wide enough to distribute stress so the wearer can safely yank on them to his heart's content. This exemplifies the essential paradox of S/M: looks real scary, feels real comfy.

The physical constraint of the bondage enables the receptive party to build orgasm-boosting muscle tension by yanking against the ropes or cuffs. Restraint also gives the bound person the freedom to thrash all she wants without knocking her partner off the bed.

Some people also enjoy bondage which is purely decorative, bondage which forces the body into challenging positions, or bondage which boosts sensation in sensitive parts of the body like breasts or genitals. For many of us, rope in and of itself is very sexy stuff.

Corsets and other forms of body constriction slow down the wearer's breathing, alter the way he moves, and reshape the body – an experience which many kinky people find entrancing and extremely erotic (as do their partners, who get to look at the results).

Some types of bondage also alter the senses. Many kinkyfolk enjoy having their attention turned inward through the use of a blindfold, which eliminates many distractions and enhances physical sensation by increasing focus. You can get an idea of how this feels by closing your eyes and running your fingers lightly over the inside of your forearm: touch feels much more intense in the dark. Similarly, earplugs can reduce hearing, and gags can change our relationship to the world around us by slowing down our breathing

and reducing our ability to communicate. All these tools offer us the chance to experience the world differently, to create a special sexual space unlike any other, and to become pleasantly dependent on a loved and trusted partner.

Kink with and without pain. It may surprise you to learn that a lot of kinky behaviors that sound scary and painful, such as whipping or flogging, may not involve any pain at all.

If you hear about a whip, you may picture something Simon Legree-ish – long and snaky and likely to tear flesh with a single stroke. But the whip your kinky friend is saving up to buy is far more likely to be many strips of soft, sensual suede or leather, bound into a beautifully braided handle, and designed to fall upon skin with a sexy caress ranging from the gentlest stroking to a deep thump that feels more like massage than torture. Such whips, called “floggers,” are used at the beginning of many scenes to warm up the skin to a glowing pink and get both players into the rhythm of the play. These sensations can be sensual, sexual and utterly delightful in and of themselves, and many players never get into anything you would describe as painful.

It may also surprise you to learn that a large percentage of those who try sensual whips find themselves desiring something stronger, more intense: floggers made of heavier, harsher leather or rubber, or the blazing sting of the cane.

A lot of the toys we use in our play are available in a wide spectrum of sensations. Some players collect a variety of clamps or clips, such as wooden clothespins, to pinch up a bit of skin – depending on the stiffness of the spring, the sensation varies from mild pressure like a lover’s gentle pinch to very intense biting sensations. Candle wax, which is spilled onto the skin in droplets or streams, may be the temperature of the water from your shower head, or hot enough to pinken the skin it touches.

People who like the more intense range of sensation – we sometimes call ourselves “pain sluts” or “pain pigs,” which is *not* an insult in our world – often surprise ourselves during play with our ability to enjoy sensations that would seem horribly painful at another time. The protected space of S/M play, the turn-on of enacting our best fantasies, and the skill of our partners in warming us up and entrancing us, can induce an altered state of consciousness in which we perceive intense sensations as magical arousal.

But if painplay isn’t your fantasy, it can be hard to understand how anyone could seek out some of these more challenging sensations, much less get turned on by them. It may help to remember some of the sensations you may have enjoyed during “conventional” sex: scratching, biting, hickeys, hair-pulling and the like. Many people find that when they are sexually aroused, such sensations take on new attributes -they’re still painful, but it’s a different kind of pain, not unpleasant but simply intense and arousing. Or consider some of the physical extremes to which you may have enjoyed pushing your body in pursuit of a sport or other goal, and how happy and blissed-out and relaxed you felt afterwards. People who enjoy strong physical sensations often report both the arousal and the relaxation as part of their pleasure.

Pain in S/M doesn’t mean whopping someone with a two-by-four. The pain we play with is very specially selected, controlled, and timed. Expert players learn to recognize the body’s different responses to “thud” or “sting.” A skilled player has astonishing intuition about when jolts of sensation should be applied one at a time, allowing the body to process the feeling fully before the next stroke, and when they should fall like rain, carrying the bottom on a river of sensation that moves too fast to resist.

Pain players become adept at “surfing” the pain, and reaching the various physical and mental states to which play can bring us.

Pain might serve to increase the focus of a scene, to enact a punishment, or to make the feeling of powerlessness more real – but many players come to enjoy pain for pain’s sake. Enthusiastic pain fans do a lot of safe, sane and consensual sharing of ways to get plenty of that “just right” pain to fly with.

Cross-dressing. Wearing the clothing of the opposite sex as an erotic turn-on is called cross-dressing. For example, many men enjoy putting on women’s clothing and allowing the female side of themselves to come to the surface; likewise, many women prefer to present themselves – perhaps occasionally for fun, or perhaps most or all of the time as an ongoing expression of identity – with male clothing and demeanor. People may cross-dress in private, as part of a masturbation ritual. Or they may make dates with partners during which they dress and play the part of the opposite gender as the role-play in a sexual, sometimes BDSM, scene.

Some cross-dress because they find a special eroticism in the clothes, or in switching gender roles, or sometimes simply because the aspect of themselves that comes to the surface in such attire feels more natural and comfortable to them than their day-to-day selves. People who cross-dress may be gay or straight or bisexual, and may or may not be involved in other forms of kinky play.

Transgendered people cross-dress because they actually feel themselves to be of a gender other than simply male or female as evidenced by their genitals. Those who live full-time in their chosen gender are called transsexual. They may go on to seek out hormone therapy and/or surgery so that their bodies match their spirits. Others may find their true selves somewhere between the genders, and employ a variety of strategies, in dress and behavior, to express themselves to others. We have listed some resources for transgendered people and their families in the Resource Guide.

Fetishes. Almost everybody has had the experience of having their sexual reaction heightened by an inanimate object. Not you? think again: ever been turned on by your lady friend's sudden appearance in a garter belt and heels, or your gentleman friend's tight t-shirt or pungent pipe smoke or scuffed cowboy boots?

Some people's reactions to objects are so unusual or strong that they get labeled "fetishes." What is or isn't considered a fetish is largely a matter of what culture you're brought up in – being turned on to large breasts is so commonplace in the U.S. that nobody thinks of it as a fetish, but an attraction to tiny delicate feet, which would be nothing unusual in China, would probably be considered kinky here. (And vice versa.)

Some common fetishes include clothing items like shoes, lingerie and diapers, materials like leather, latex and silk, body fluids like sweat, urine, breast milk and blood, and body parts like hair, feet, buttocks, breasts and genitals.

We occasionally encounter someone who is so centered on her fetish that she can't get off without it, although this is fairly rare. We suspect that if she lived in a culture where she could get her needs met easily and without shame, so that her fetish didn't grow into an object of guilt-fueled obsession, this desire would become simply part of a broader range of sexual response. For most kinkyfolk, however, fetishes are the icing on the cake, something that boosts their sexual response but doesn't substitute for it.

Things that look kinky – are they? Many a parent, sibling or friend has worried themselves to a frazzle fearing that young Johnny is getting "weird" – i.e., he's into kinky sex – because he's gotten a tattoo or a body piercing.

Well, he may be; some kinkyfolk enjoy changing the appearance of their bodies with tattoos, piercings, and scars from cuttings or brandings, and some kinky pain practices leave behind marks which

their owners wear with pride. But many people who do not identify as kinky nonetheless enjoy body modifications. The modification may be a statement of community or pride, designed to help like-minded individuals recognize its owner as a kindred spirit. Or it may be given as part of a ritual, part of a vision quest, to celebrate an important life transition or to reclaim the body after a bad experience: after all, the only person allowed to modify a body is its owner, right? (Dossie was once part of a circle of women chanting “No more rape! No more rape!” as the woman in the center had her labia pierced; the piercee had set up this ritual to reclaim her body and get closure on a traumatic experience from her past.) Or the individual involved may simply enjoy turning her body into a work of art, bright with color and flashing metal. Don’t forget that the brief flash of pain from the piercing, or the longer but less intense burn of the tattoo, is over quickly, often followed by a tidal wave of endorphins: the pain is brief, the euphoria will probably last till tomorrow.

Dear Folks,

I know that you have known that I was gay for quite some time, and even had an idea before I ever came out to you. I wonder if what I have to tell you now will come as a surprise, or if it is something you may have already suspected.

I'm into S/M, the whole whips and chains thing. I wear my leather with pride, and participate in the scene in public and private. I belong to several organizations that provide a social and educational outlet for folks. We also participate in fundraising for a number of local and national charities. I am happy with my life, but it saddens me to know that you won't really understand. I worry about Mom in particular, because I don't think she has ever really accepted the lesbian thing.

My sweet partner that you both like so much is quite the sight, dressed in her fishnets and leather, with her hair all teased up. It's a different image from the quiet teacher you know. We have given several demonstrations in the art of Japanese Rope Bondage. It is one of her favorite things to do to me, and I am very fond of other sorts of bondage as well.

The thing that really draws me to this lifestyle is that I believe that pain of the body draws us closer to purity of the spirit. I know that there have been sects of various religions all over the world that feel the same way. There are also opportunities to serve and be served. One of the other things I do is act as a bootblack. It is very humbling to kneel in front of someone and shine their shoes. I am still pretty shy, and this is also a good way to get to talk to people.

I am a heavy masochist. I have a love/hate relationship with the pain, and feel that enduring makes me stronger. I have seen friends become involved in this lifestyle and grow stronger within themselves. Some of us have grown together over the years into a sort of family. It is very comforting to know that we have such good friends.

I think that the most important thing for you to understand is that everything I do is with a clear head and conscience. We educate ourselves and each other about where the good or bad spots to hit are, how to negotiate for what we want to do, and how to take care of each other when the whips and chains are set aside. Honor is important above all else.

Take care,

Your firstborn child

If you think body modifications are too strange or weird, think about all your friends who have had breast enhancements, face lifts and other forms of cosmetic surgery – all body modifications with much higher risk than your average piercing or tattoo. The urge to change and decorate one's body crosses all cultures and all of human history.

Some people also worry that piercings, tattoos and such on the

skins of their loved ones may signal membership in a cult or other destructive social group. Our experience is that this is very rare - cultists may or may not be into body modification, and certainly represent only a tiny fraction of people with transformed bodies. It's also true that some youth gangs sport identifying tattoos, but again, such marks represent a very small percentage of the tattooed bodies out there. If your child, friend, partner or sibling sports a tattoo or other mark that you don't understand, simply ask her what, if anything, it means.

Many people also get concerned when they see a friend or relative dressing in leather or other fetish materials, or wearing symbols like collars. These days, such clothing is quite fashionable, and may or may not have anything to do with what the wearer likes to do sexually. Once again, if you're not sure what someone's leather catsuit or chain collar is all about, the best way to find out is to ask.

Dominance and submission. Many kinkyfolk like to enact fantasies in which one person is powerful – perhaps an owner, a disciplinarian, an abductor, a parent – and the other is powerless, a slave or a child or an animal or a captive. They may play with these roles for a short time, as an erotic escapade, or for longer periods – days, weeks or even years.

This type of play can be alarming to contemplate. Often, it mimics situations such as slavery or abusive parenting that we know would be wrong if they took place in the real world. Or it may push our buttons as feminists or as people of color to see echoes of sexist or racist scenarios enacted for erotic fun.

Yet people who play with such energies may be accomplishing something very powerful and real. Often, they find that the experience of giving up power for a pre-negotiated period of time, then taking it back afterward (or being given power and learning to

handle it responsibly and give it back intact) leaves them feeling more powerful, not less; it's as though handling the "currency" of power actually makes us better power-handlers, wiser in the ways of power and the ways in which it can be used or abused.

For players who enjoy dominance and submission (often abbreviated to D/S or D/s), exchanging power by assuming the roles of all-powerful dominant or powerless submissive is more important to their sexuality than any physical stimulation could be. They express themselves by commanding and obeying, in serving and being served, and find deep and profound satisfaction in these roles.

The relationships they form are most often described as Master or Mistress and slave, or perhaps a variation such as Baron and body servant, or Goddess and acolyte. Often, symbols of ownership such as collars or special rings serve as reminders of the relationship even during times when the participants can't be physically together.

Sometimes these roles have overtones of teacher/student or nurturer/nurturee; relationships such as Daddy/boy allow the participants to reclaim part of themselves by playing as a parent – strict or indulgent or both by turns – or as a beloved child.

Some players enter into these roles only while playing. Others form partnerships in which their roles are enacted, at varying levels of intensity, full-time.

D/S play may involve a lot of sex, very little, or none. It may also involve a lot of S/M stimulation, or none at all. The players design relationships and activities that give them the thrill of control or of being controlled with the greatest possible feeling of safety and reward.

Alternate personae. A persona is kind of an alternate self – an aspect of your personality that can be brought to the surface and played out as if you were someone different from your everyday self. Many kinkyfolk enjoy exploring aspects of themselves that

they discover in their fantasies, or in someone else's fantasies.

Kinkyfolk enjoy exploring many personae – people of different ages, such as children or infants; people with a lot of power, such as cops and nurses and drill sergeants; people with very little power, such as slaves and captives; animals like puppies and ponies; and even fantasy creatures from science fiction or myth. Some players develop a whole cast of characters that they may play out on different occasions, and who grow and change over time, just like regular people.

To play out a persona, players may acquire costumes: Victorian governess and schoolgirl are popular, as are military and police uniforms. Furnishings might include an oversized school desk, or a corner of a room made to resemble a prison cell. The purpose is to bring forth some part of one's self that is not expressed elsewhere, and live it for a while in an erotic context. Like any kind of playacting, the rewards can be playful or profound. Sometimes we learn something about ourselves that we didn't know before: Catherine, who was in real life a rather well-behaved child, has had surprisingly moving experiences when allowed to play the part of whiny and rebellious nine-year-old "Jessie" with her astonishingly patient although firm "Daddy."

To My Dearest,

What can I tell you of my love that you do not know already?
Let me write of surrender, sacrifice and acceptance.

Those things that we all similarly share in our commitments and involvements of the heart.

But as you know, there must be something more.

Something you might consider dark and even frightening as it exists in your realm of the unknown, the uncertain, the unexplained. I will take your fear away. I will explain your mind into peace.

Let me delve into the fearsome and destroy it with knowledge.

Let me write of the consummation of love. Lust embodied? Perhaps to some.

But lust does not need to be embodied, there does not need to be a consummation as we know it. Greater things might happen when one resists. Does this sound like the declarations of a Bible Beater preaching against pre-marital sex?

So, then let me write of my love of leather and feathers. How my lover closes his eyes and stands close to me so that he can feel the feathers brush against his cheek and smell my perfume embedded in them so that he can remember me in my absence.

Then let me suggest that when I cover his eyes, perhaps with a blindfold, this sensation is magnified.

Let me write of subtle gestures. Tactile remembrances wrapped up in leather and lace.

Mental stimulation, seduction that overpowers lust.

Desire that endures through play.

Play?

I play with desire.

Hardly a frightening concept.

I create certain scenes in which to play with desire.

I draw desire out without allowing its completion. There is only foreplay in its purest form.

My lover and I discard the tradition: step one, two and three, foreplay, climax, and closure with a cuddle.

They do happen in a way, our way, but there is no pathetic lust quickly quenched, no sloppy slapping of flesh with reckless abandon or irresponsibility in which someone might get silently hurt but say nothing because the other is having their moment.

And without the quenching and completion there is no letdown. No boredom.

And nothing goes uncommunicated because I am in control and I do not allow silenced pain.

Yes, I am in control.

I dominate him.

I control the scenes and the communication. I take responsibility for our desire.

Subtle gestures of control in a fantasy world of our choosing. The set is prepared, the costumes are in place, and we are prepared for anything.

He is prepared to surrender himself to my will,
And I am prepared to accept his surrender and take him into me.

A man that will lie beneath my feet and love it, is worthy of my love.

He engulfs himself inside of me because he desires to physically, visually embody what he feels emotionally.

The nourisher in me takes him into my arms and takes control of every bit of him. I enjoy controlling him, knowing that I am the center of his experience leading inside of himself.

I take his clothing, bind his limbs, blindfold his eyes, and he is vulnerable to me.

He sacrifices and I accept.

All pretenses are stripped away.

And yes, I do brandish a whip. I tie him up and whip him because I love the sensation of the leather on flesh, I love the reaction coming from him and I know that I am helping to take him fully away from reality for some moments.

He takes the pain that I give him and turns inward, into himself.

He does not fear the whip, or get hurt.

It is a constructive pain that allows him entry into parts of his mind that are normally closed off. In some senses it is as if the whip hypnotizes him into a trance.

When a person is afraid, they fight the pain, which then fights them. When one is ready to surrender and work with their pain, they can reach inside of themselves to a place of calm normally not available to a mind in a conscious, unaltered state.

As when a woman gives birth unaided with "painkillers," she removes herself from the moment and takes the pain inside of her.

I help carry him to this place and he knows he is safe with me.

When the scene is over and he returns to our sphere, I take him into my arms.

I hold him and we cuddle.

This is the epitome of the symbol of our love.

At this point we become one.

Like any lovers over the world hope to become.

Faithfully Yours,

A

Most people who play with personae do so only occasionally, as kind of a "vacation" from their day-to-day selves; others more frequently or at specific times, like when they have sex. It is unusual but not unheard-of for a person to choose to spend most or all of her time in an alternate persona – or perhaps it would be better to say in what looks like an alternate persona from the outside. She may tell you she has discovered, in this form, her true self.

Dancing in the shadows. All the players we've described in this chapter may achieve tremendous personal growth by playing in the area of their consciousness that Jung called "the shadow." Your shadow is the place where you keep all those aspects of yourself that seem dangerous or unmanageable or too scary to take out and look at – maybe cruelty or bossiness or anger, maybe neediness or dependency or "smallness," or whatever else you may have forbidden yourself to be aware of. Important parts of our shadow selves may come to our attention as images in dreams – or, more to our point, in fantasies: just about everybody's erotic fantasies involve archetypes from their shadows. Jung believed that personal integration and therapeutic healing resulted from reclaiming those parts of ourselves that we may have lost in the shadows, welcoming them home so that we can become at one with ourselves.

When kinkyfolk explore their roles, they are dipping into that shadow, bringing their scariest stuff into the light in a controlled way, learning that just maybe it's not quite as awful as they thought it was. Imagine what it must feel like to trot out some of your worst stuff, and to discover that you can control it – that it won't take over and turn you into a monster, that you can tuck it away again when you're done playing with it – and that someone you care about finds it sexy. An astonishing revelation, isn't it?

A birthday kidnapping. We would like to share with you a description of an elaborate scene, complete with behind the scenes details, so you can understand better both the safety, and the thrills and chills, of how we play. For many of us, one of the finest forms of birthday celebration with which a player can be honored is the birthday kidnapping.

Kidnapping is one of the most common fantasies, seen throughout several centuries of literature and other popular media. Some of Dossie's most treasured childhood fantasies derive from

those Nancy Drew mysteries in which Nancy gets kidnapped and tied up. The basic kidnap fantasy has the victim enjoying being helpless against a greater force and somehow, in the fantasy, all the mean implacable kidnappers magically seem to know exactly what the victim likes and exactly how to do it. Perhaps a key part of this fantasy is to have our own sensation, sexuality, orgasm, forcibly birthed from us with no conscious effort on our part.

So if your kinky person wanted to set up a birthday kidnap for her beloved – and what a fine birthday gift this might be – here is how she could go about it.

A partner, play partner, lover or best friend usually coordinates the event. A number of other close friends, perhaps from two to six more, assist. The coordinator – why don't we call her the M.C. for Mistress of Ceremonies? – picks the birthday child's brain for fantasy material, and establishes a detailed list of what is okay and not okay with her. One of your authors has been tactfully and discreetly asked if there is anyone among her friends that she might *not* want to be kidnapped by.

The consent list is often posted at the event so everyone can refer to it. Details like “wears contact lenses” and “the M.C. will have her asthma inhalers ready if needed” are listed, along with safety precautions: “Be careful with his right wrist, he sprained it last month,” and the all-important list of limits, which is what she doesn't want done -examples might be “No penetration, and no tickling whatsoever,” or “He only does genital play with his partner.” Safer sex precautions would also be listed here.

Very important on this list are the things she enjoys – “Blindfolds, earplugs, relaxed bondage, gentle hair pulling,” “She loves the vibrator but very gently, please,” and some useful ways to get her turned on: “He totally melts if you nibble on his neck.”

Most often, the birthday honoree has given consent to the

kidnapping in advance, although sometimes he is not told when this is going to happen to maintain an element of surprise.

The M.C. then gets together with the gang of kidnappers, with the written list, and a plan is devised. For instance, the M.C. might arrange to have the honored kidnappée in a certain parking lot at a certain time where the gang will “subdue” her, blindfold her, pack her into a car and drive around for a while to get her a little disoriented. The location and nature of the kidnap requires careful planning to be sure that no passersby see fit to attempt a rescue.

A more discreet kidnapping might occur at the birthday boy’s home, with the “gang” showing up in costume as pirates, juvenile delinquents, cowboys or just plain old scary leatherpeople. The fantasy may be announced – “We are kidnapping you, and you have no choice in the matter, so you might as well relax. Don’t move, or it will go hard with you.” Kidnappees who want to physically struggle as hard as they can need to get consent, and give warning, in advance, as it is much harder to subdue a struggling victim than the movies might have led you to believe. Struggling is also ill-advised in public. Usually, a small amount of pulling and whimpering “No, no, no” will suffice, although for those who love to struggle, arrangements can certainly be made.

Why are we kidnapping you? Because it’s your birthday, silly, and because we all earnestly desire to see you writhe and squeal in ecstasy.

Since unfamiliarity and disorientation add to the feeling of being helpless and out of control, the “victim” may then be moved to another apartment, still blindfolded, so the sense of being in another space/ time/universe, devoted only to sexual sensation, is reinforced. Think of fantasies of desert harems, or medieval fortresses on high peaks in Transylvania.

Once the “victim” is securely kidnapped, blindfolded and tied

down, some calming or grounding activity might be appropriate. Foreplay is a very important part of kidnappings, as you all will understand if you refer to your own fantasies. The slow removal of clothing, while a number of people carefully control the arms and legs, can be a suspenseful beginning. Once the victim is naked, several people might give a gentle massage, until the big muscles of the back, arms and legs are relaxed.

As with any scene, kidnappings tend to start very easy and work up. Massage may be followed by pinching, slapping, stroking, spanking, and whatever else the attendees' perverted imagination and the consent list might inspire. A good kidnapping might last for several hours, as the "victim" becomes entranced. Stimulations don't have to be intense – Dossie recalls one birthday kidnapping in which the predominant activity was smearing chocolate truffles all over the "victim's" bound and blindfold body, and then licking and sucking them off. Mmmmm, Godiva!

Lots of very pleasurable stimulations become possible when you have a number of pairs of hands. For example, some people might just hold the victim while others stimulate. Being held is a nurturing and reassuring experience, a sexy contrast to more intense stimulations that others may be offering.

Don't forget that the victim's lover knows more than anyone about how this birthday child gets off, so for practical reasons, often the most familiar person takes over as orgasm approaches. There is a romantic aspect to this – kidnapped and "tortured" by all these "strangers," finally to wind up in the capable hands of your own true love.

Because that's what a birthday kidnapping is all about – love. The love of a lover and friends that would go to all this effort to put together a production number of the senses for a very lucky audience of one. Most of us get to experience this kind of spoiling...

well, only in our dreams.

Spiritual practices. Some S/M and other kinky players have developed forms of spiritual practice based on the same body stresses and intense sensations we have already described in the context of personal exploration and eroticism. This might sound off-the-wall to those of us who are not accustomed to seeking spiritual consciousness in the body. Our cultural history, starting with the Puritans, has tended to see body and soul as incompatible and inexorably at odds with each other, and to think of religious practice as a process of freeing the soul from the body.

Other traditions, ancient and current, have explored many paths to spiritual consciousness that involve being in the body: trance dancing, Sufi whirling, gospel revival, yoga, ritual drumming, sweat lodges and the like. Ancient Mayans practiced ritual piercing, and medieval European monastics practiced flagellation. Certain religious traditions in India, Southeast Asia, and among the First Americans involve piercing the body and then putting tremendous stress on these piercings by dancing, tying them to a tree or by suspending the body from them. Many peoples have discovered that body stress can be a route to religious ecstasy.

How does it work? Current theory among practitioners is that prolonged stressing of the body produces the release of neurotransmitters such as endorphins, which can bring about an altered state of consciousness akin to trance or spiritual communion. S/M people frequently discover spiritual awareness in play, and we can use our safe, sane and consensual skills to create a safe environment in which the spiritual seeker can explore ritual S/M.

S/M ritual uses the whole range of stimulations familiar to the pain player – piercings, temporary and permanent, floggings, brandings, corseting, bondage, sensory deprivation, suspension – the entire spectrum of body Stressors that the explorative can learn to

do safely and serenely – along with more conventional trance induction through meditation, dancing and drumming.

Catherine writes of a deeply spiritual experience during an intense scene:

“I had been wishing for some months to wear the image of an elephant – a being with which I feel great emotional affinity – on my skin. When I heard that one of our community’s most respected body modification artists was performing a branding demonstration, and was looking for someone to be branded, I volunteered.

“Now, branding on human skin isn’t done the way it is on cowhide – as a single strike from a pre-formed brand. Instead, small pieces of sheet metal are heated and pressed to the skin edge-first one at a time, to create an image that conforms to the body’s curves and that heals more safely and easily. But this technique makes branding a lengthier and more intense experience than you might imagine: the design we’d worked out would involve eleven separate strikes. I was looking forward to it with excitement but some trepidation.

“The evening came, and a group of supportive friends and onlookers gathered to watch the demonstration. The brander and his partner spent some time establishing an appropriate environment: they set up a small shrine around an image of Lord Ganesh, the Hindu elephant deity, burned incense, and led the group and me in breathing exercises. They marked the design on my leg, then had me lie comfortably on a table, supported by sandbags to help me hold my position. My partner stood near my head and held my hand.

“I heard the blowtorch go ‘whoosh, ’ then the brander told me to be ready for the first strike. It was unbelievably intense. I inhaled with a ragged gasp, and exhaled with a deep growl. My body convulsed, but I was able to hold my leg still.

“The second strike was even harder to handle. And on the third, I started to get scared: could I really manage eight more? My fear broke my concentration, and on the fourth stroke my leg jerked uncontrollably. Fortunately, the brander was able to pull the metal away from my skin before the design was ruined. But the stress and the failure were almost more than I could handle: I sobbed, grabbing my hair at the roots to try to maintain my emotional balance. The brander, concerned, asked me if I could go on – I took a deep breath and nodded.

“On the fifth strike, I was almost lifted off the table by a gust of orgasm-like energy that passed through my body like a hurricane, starting from my leg and tossing me in wave after wave, lasting for what felt like minutes. After it had passed, I began to giggle uncontrollably: my irreverent mind had called up the old joke, ‘Do you smoke after sex?’ – ‘I don’t know, I never looked.’

“And then the next strike fell, and I began to journey through time. I traveled back and visited with my own child self. I held her close, told her I was doing this for her, that I would always take care of her, and that I loved her. My laughter turned to tears. During the final strokes, I cried and chanted to the little girl I once was, cherishing the short time I had with her.

“I look back on the brand, excruciating as it was, as an incredibly precious moment of healing – of my childhood, my aging, and myself. The actual mark has faded now to where you have to look carefully to see it at all, but I wouldn’t trade the experience for anything.”

Yes, but is it sex? If you’re accustomed to thinking of sex only as orgasm-seeking genital contact, some of the behaviors we’ve been describing may seem kind of confusing. (As Catherine said when she first started exploring kinky play: “When does someone get laid around here, anyway?”)

Now might be a good time to begin expanding your definition of “sex.” In these virus-ridden times, when many conventional forms of sex carry a high risk of disease, that’s not such a bad idea anyway, right?

Some forms of play, like bondage or blindfolds or light spanking, may enhance sex that would otherwise not seem particularly kinky. Some folks use these activities as foreplay to increase their arousal so that they can get greater enjoyment out of conventional sex. A few people can get so aroused by kinky play that they can reach orgasm from these behaviors alone.

However, many people are perfectly happy to get flogged or to cross-dress or to be a puppy with no expectation of conventional genital sex. This can seem bewildering – what’s the point?

The reward to the player may be intensely emotional, intimate, or even transcendent, while not including any form of genital arousal or orgasm. Some spiritual seekers speak of the “kundalini orgasm” or “whole-body orgasm,” in which the player is swept away in a giant wave of sensation or emotion that is not genitally focused. (Catherine described one in the story you just read.) Other players find such a profound sense of “rightness” in exploring a chosen role that conventional sex seems unnecessary or even distracting. Still others simply enjoy the playfulness, intensity or intimacy of kinky play, and prefer to keep that side of their play separate from conventional sex.

So, as regards to the question that started this section, the answer is: We don’t know. The best definition we’ve come up with is that sex is anything that makes you feel sexy – and sometimes you might just have to take your friend or relative’s word for what makes her feel sexy.

⇨ 6 ⇨

How We Stay Safe

If you've seen all the movies, novels and other sensationalistic trash that shows kinky people as deranged and dangerous, it may surprise you to hear that we actually give a great deal of attention to our own physical and emotional safety and that of our partners. If you're feeling worried that your friend or relative is going to be harmed by his participation in alternative sex, this chapter may help you relax a bit.

Does an S/M player simply throw her partner down on the floor and begin flailing away with a whip? (You've probably seen movies that show her doing just that.) Does a cross-dresser surprise his partner by greeting her at the door in high heels, a mini-skirt and the brand-new silk blouse she just bought herself last week?

Well, no – such behavior would be ethically unacceptable, and would also make it very difficult for them to find partners. It's realistic to think of alternative sexuality as a high-risk sport like scuba-diving or mountain climbing – an activity that has some risk, but whose risks can be lessened with knowledge, care and forethought. So how does your kinky person engage in his chosen

“sport” with the greatest possible safety and responsibility? Here are some of the ways:

With care. That means care for each other’s well-being: physical, emotional and spiritual. We do what we do with care and respect for the amazing fact that another human being has chosen to meet us in this most intimate and vulnerable, as well as forbidden, world of fantasies and dreams come true. It is axiomatic among players that kinky play should be “safe, sane and consensual.”

With consent. We have said before that we believe that true consent in all matters sexual involves an active collaboration by everyone involved for the pleasure and well-being of everybody. That means consent freely and happily given, not by rape or bullying or emotional blackmail (tactics which are unfortunately well-known in the world of people vastly more conservative than we). For us, because we explore in areas that carry so much potential risk, consent is sacred. So how do we work that out in practice?

With negotiation. Kinky play, scenes and roles, limits and safety issues, are ideally negotiated in great detail in advance – preferably outside of the play environment, or what we call “scene space.” That means that it works better to discuss your desires and plans over breakfast, or maybe the day before, or in some neutral, unpressured space wherein the players can think clearly.

Consent doesn’t simply mean that one person tells another to go ahead and do whatever they like: thoughtful consent is a lot more detailed than this. Consent really means that both players have a line item veto, and that means they need to know what is going to be on all the lines.

Your authors were asked at a presentation we did for a Mensa group, “You guys keep talking about negotiation, and I’m not sure

what you mean by that. Could you show us what a negotiation looks like, please?” So we did: quickly, and without nearly as much detail as we’d probably use in a real-world negotiation, we play-acted the roles of a committed lesbian couple negotiating their first play scene together. Dossie suggested that she’d like to have her hands tied to the headboard and to be treated like a little girl, but specified that she didn’t want her feet tied and that she didn’t want any tickling or pain. Catherine suggested a test run on that new dildo the two of them just bought, and asked if Dossie would enjoy sucking on her nipples (Dossie would). At the end of this quickie demonstration, there was a shocked silence from the audience, broken only by someone saying wistfully, “I wish *everyone* did that.” Well, so do we.

Dear Dossie and Catherine,

I sat down to write a letter for your book with an open and willing heart. I think it is a wonderful idea. But I could not do it, it hurt too much. I am transsexual, a dyke, and a switch. I had to write a letter coming out TS to all my relatives, a long time ago. I guess that would qualify as so closely analogous to kinky, to most readers, as to make no difference.

When I wrote the letter, I wanted more than anything to keep their love. I knew so many transsexuals who had lost everyone, and I was ready to lose everyone, but I didn't want to. If this letter worked, I would still be in their life. That meant to me that every rhetorical goal in my letter had to be compassionate in both presentation and content; nothing to hurt on purpose, remembering them as loved.

My second goal was to make the ones who were going to be abusive, no matter what, shut up. It didn't work, but it kept anyone from reciting Jerry Springer to my face. I was very upfront about religious objections - "some of you may consider this a religious abomination. I understand your dilemma. I ask only that..." sort of thing. Short but clear that there was no new revelation they should carry to me from their pastor.

My third goal was to normalize their expectations. What different things were going to happen in their lives? Was I planning to always look like a boy in a dress? Could they count on improvements? What's going to happen around them? People are less scared when they know what to expect.

My fourth and last goal was to give them a context. People you love do understand that they have to accept ambiguities. And if you give them a context - any context - if they love you, and are not total bigots, they will use that context to excuse everything, to love you still. For instance I think "woman trapped in a man's body" is complete bullshit; but when my grandmother says it as she makes me tea, I nod sagely and say, well, it's a little more than that, and different, but yes. Because her love is more important than an understanding that will serve nothing but my ideals. Scrambling this woman's belief system in the last ten years of her life for the sake of a small point is just not good karma.

If I had been simply honest, I would have said: this is my soul. This is how I know my soul lives in my body when I open my eyes in the morning. This is how I know I am loved when my lover puts her hand inside me. This is how I continue to have a heart. But...I wanted to keep them. And they will never, ever understand this part of me. So I gave them the kind of letter I described above.

For some of the audience, it worked. They "got it" just by thinking about it for awhile. I am not sure my letter did anything more than keep them calm while compassionate imagination did the rest. The other half made horrible religious comments. Then... my

uncle in the jesus rules branch... came down with terrible cancer. And as I tried to be there for him, in very small but human ways, he and his family just stopped being unkind. My being twisted was just part of life, and there were larger things going on. I think that this is my basic understanding about any kind of "coming out" - that if there is not total repudiation and rejection, eventually the pattern of the family or relationship reasserts itself, and the great issue becomes relatively unimportant.

J

An exercise which many players use to get them started negotiating is called "Yes-No-Maybe." Both players set aside an uninterrupted hour or two, and sit down together with a huge pad of paper. They write down everything they can think of that two people could possibly do together sexually - everything from holding hands to the wildest kink they've ever heard of or imagined. They don't hold back or censor themselves, just write everything down.

Next, each player takes a fresh sheet of paper, and mark three columns: Yes, No and Maybe. She takes all the items on the big list and puts the ones she feels just fine about under “Yes.” The ones she absolutely doesn’t want to do under any circumstances go under “No.” If she’d consider doing something if she felt safe enough, or turned on enough, or whatever, she puts it under “Maybe.”

Then, the partners make the easiest plan they can think of out of what they find in common on their “Yes” lists. They pick one or two activities to try the first time, saving “Maybes” for later when they feel more secure. As they start easy and build slowly over time, they gradually develop a repertoire of sexual and kinky skills while learning more about each other’s needs, wants and limits.

Old enough and sober enough. We hope it’s clear by now that all the practices we’ve described in this book require an extremely high level of communication, emotional sophistication and ethics. It takes a long time to develop such sophistication. Thus, doing any sexual activity, particularly alternative sexual activities, with people under the age of consent in your state or country is not just illegal – it’s a very bad idea.

Most children simply don’t have the emotional or intellectual ability to make truly informed choices about sexual behaviors; they also rarely have enough real-world power to take care of themselves if they’re being subjected to adult abuse or exploitation. They could really be harmed, and it is our job, as adults, to protect them from harm.

It is also critically important that everybody involved in alternative sexual practices must be able to give meaningful, well-considered consent. If someone’s mood or judgment has been altered by alcohol or drugs, their consent doesn’t mean much. Intoxication is strongly discouraged in virtually all kink communities. (Besides, why would anyone want to set up all that

wonderful kinky sex and then miss out on it because they're too drunk or stoned to feel the sensations? Our experience is that "feeling no pain" usually means feeling no pleasure either.)

Limits. A good player knows his limits, whether he is planning to be the bottom (victim, slave, baby, kidnapee, or whatever) or the top (villain, master, mommy, pirate captain, etc.). Everybody has limits. Even though some of us would rather dream of wide open spaces, where anything is possible, the truth is that we are planning to bring a fantasy into reality, where suddenly the laws of gravity and the limits of our knowledge, our experience or our desire – often even our equipment – are entirely real and need to be dealt with.

If Bill is turned off by sticky feelings, it's good idea for Joe to know it before he cuts loose with the whipped cream and an eager tongue. Some people have limits around real traumas from the past – Dossie still doesn't play with anything that sounds like punishment – or anything else that they believe will be too scary or too uncomfortable, not erotic, or anything else that might cause problems in the scene. Tops have limits too – limits of experience, as well as whatever is uncomfortable or undesirable for them. We all have physical limits – asthma, carpal tunnel syndrome, contact lenses, etc. – that need to be discussed and understood before anybody gets tied up.

During negotiations, information is exchanged and agreements made about safer sex, any health risks (from herpes to HIV), birth control, and what precautions the players plan to take to reduce the risk of passing something unwanted from one to another. Your authors strongly believe that all sexually active adults have a responsibility to educate themselves about safer sex and practice until they become competent with whatever protections, like condoms, they deem advisable to preserve everybody's health.

Many kinky players have advantages here, as most toys can be easily sterilized or kept clean, and fantasy role-playing is often a no-risk sexual activity. We wish we could refer you to a good book on current safer-sex thinking here, but there hasn't been one in several years, and diseases and their prevention change rapidly. The World Wide Web and your local sexually transmitted disease clinic can answer any questions you might have; good places to start your search would be your local chapter of Planned Parenthood, or the excellent website at <http://www.safersex.org>.

Two people who have played with each other before might simply inquire if anything has changed, or talk about how they envision the proposed scene. If they are planning a scene that has the potential for profound emotional catharsis, they might more deeply discuss their feelings, or what works for them if they should need comfort, or calming, or support. Both of them: once when Catherine played violent juvenile delinquent ravishing Dossie's innocent prom queen in what became a very intense scene, it was Catherine who needed comfort and reassurance afterward – which, we assure you, she received in generous measure.

Many players also set a time, perhaps the next morning over breakfast, when they will discuss how the scene went for them, what worked, what didn't, what they might have liked a little different: such discussions should also include thanks and praise for what made them the happiest about the scene, which is often the most important information of all.

Safewords. Much kinky play involves the fantasy of nonconsent, which means sometimes the bottom may wish to make believe he doesn't actually want to (even though he does), and may enjoy shrieking, “No! No! Not the rabbit fur! Anything but the rabbit fur!” (This is affectionately known among players as “Please don't throw me in the briar patch.”) So some other way to

communicate actual nonconsent is needed, ideally in words that neither player would ever utter in the heat of passion: “Please, please, please” is too ambiguous. Some players call for a break, others use pet words (uncle, for instance), and many find the words “red, yellow and green” a convenient code, where “red” means “Stop right now, we need to talk,” “yellow” means something like “Slow down” or “Go a little easier, please,” and “green” means “This is great, let’s keep going!”

Safewords may be used by the top or the bottom, and are always to be respected. It should be understood that a person who has stopped a scene with a safeword may be very embarrassed or feeling like a failure, so the ethical response to a safeword is mutual support, reflecting the assumption that a safeword communicates an honest need and is never to be questioned.

One kinky friend of ours, the mother of young children, has taught her kids and their friends how to safeword – an ideal strategy for keeping childish tickling and wrestling at a level that feels safe and fun for all concerned.

Years ago Dossie described this approach to negotiation to a friend who was worried about Dossie’s safety in exploring S/M. This friend, on hearing what you have just read, was so moved that she burst into tears. She explained how much she wished sex in her non-kinky life could be negotiated with so much thoughtfulness and respect. Indeed, the principles of negotiation in S/M were derived from what sex therapists recommend to all sex partners: good and accurate communication improves everybody’s sex life. So much for the “unspeakable.”

Communication. Talking explicitly about sex has been forbidden in our culture for a very long time, so anyone who values clear and honest communication about sexual matters can expect to invest some time and energy in learning how. We promise you that

should *you* choose to make the effort to overcome embarrassment and learn to talk about sex, your investment will be richly rewarded. Imagine how your life would be if it were easy to say “That tickles!” or “You’re rubbing... too hard, too soft, too high, too low,” whatever it is that will make your lovemaking work better. Only with good communication has your friend or relative been able to develop the trust on which good sex is based – remember, the shared vulnerability of risky communications can only strengthen and deepen intimacy, and get everybody more of exactly the right kind of sex they need for the joy in their lives. If you’d like to learn more about being a better sexual communicator, you’ll find some good books about communication for people in all sexual lifestyles in the Resource Guide. But meanwhile, rest assured that your kinky person has already done at least some of the hard work of learning to communicate the information required to keep her sex life healthy, happy and fun.

Safeguards. Everyone is responsible for safety. All players, not just the tops, are responsible for researching any proposed activity and learning how to do whatever that is safely. For instance, it is safe to spank or flog on well-padded parts of the body, and not on unprotected areas where organs or tendons, or other vulnerable parts, might get bruised. Good bondage requires knowing how to maintain circulation and comfort: very few folks are eroticized to pins and needles. Reading good books and attending support groups and workshops are good sources of information about how to make one’s dreams come true in a healthy and safe way. So if you want to know if your kinky person is playing safely, you might ask about where she gets her information.

While the top is primarily responsible for preserving safety during a scene, and knowing how to do bondage or use a whip correctly, the bottom is also responsible: for setting limits, for

letting the top know when something is going wrong, for using safewords when needed. The bottom may feel reluctant to stop a scene in progress to let someone know that his foot has fallen asleep; the top may feel reluctant to ask if the bottom wants more or less of whatever – it is embarrassing, and definitely disrupts the flow. Experienced players learn that interruptions can be worked through, and that a level of arousal that took half an hour of foreplay to get to in the first place can probably be reattained in just a few minutes after a pause.

So the bottom who heroically thrashes on even when he knows that the whip is landing in the wrong place is not a hero at all, but simply irresponsible: imagine how his top will feel in the morning when he sees all those welts in the wrong place!

Similarly, emotional safety needs to be discussed and negotiated, and that means we may need to talk about some pretty vulnerable stuff. If a play partner wants you to role-play a rapist and you have been raped yourself, then there might be a lot of risk for me in there, and even if you decide you want to try it out, and even if it turns out to be an effective way to empower myself and heal old wounds, it is obviously important that your partner in this endeavor should know about your concerns.

A final kind of safety involves partners who have not played together before. While predators are rare in the kinky communities – possibly rarer than in the straight world – they do exist, and playing with someone you don't know very well without protecting yourself is foolishly dangerous. Thus, one of the most important functions of our kinky community is to help us take care of ourselves. When we play with someone new in private for the first time, we set up a “silent alarm” – a trusted friend who knows where we are, who we're with, and when we're expected back home. We may set up a special check-in time at which we're supposed to call our friend to

let her know we're okay; if we don't show up or call, the friend may have directions to call the police, or to take some other agreed-upon action. We also make sure that our play partner knows ahead of time that we've taken these precautions (which, thank heavens, are very rarely necessary).

Two different worlds. Probably the ultimate safety device in the playing out of fantasies is the clear boundary between scene space and the rest of our lives. Much of the content of most people's fantasies, kidnappings, pleasure slaves, and so forth, are unacceptable approaches to how they are going to live their lives in the real world. If any of us choose to be victims or villains as a permanent lifestyle, like at work or raising the children, obviously we would be making dysfunctional choices with potential for harm to others, and our lives wouldn't work out very well. So we make agreements with people we trust, and with clear negotiation, to pretend to be the creature of our fantasies for the duration of a scene, or a weekend, or at certain times in a long-term relationship.

The very language we use to describe ourselves defines the boundary between kink and our everyday lives. We call it "play," and call ourselves "players." What we do is a "scene," who we pretend to be is a "persona" or "role," where we do it is in a "playroom," and the implements we use are "toys."

Understanding the difference between fantasy and reality is the customary definition of sanity, and it is our criterion for sane play. Good players become experts at negotiating this boundary, and adept at changing roles from "Lord of the Universe" to "It's my turn to do the dishes, right?" Agility in these matters comes with practice, and a sense of humor is most helpful. What is important, psychologically and emotionally, is that we know when we are playing, and what we are playing, and when we are not.

In a previous book¹, we compared this boundary to making a

fireplace before you light the fire, so a force which could be scary and destructive becomes a safe source of heat, warmth, comfort and energy.

And so the space, mental or physical, in which we play out our kinks become like the play houses or treehouses of our childhoods – a place set aside for make believe.

*“Others find
Peace of mind
In pretending:
Couldn’t you? Couldn’t I? Couldn’t We?”*

1. Easton & Liszt, “The Topping Book: Or, Getting Good At Being Bad,” 1995

Your Kinky Person's World – And Welcome To It

A brief history of sex-negativism. This idea that sex is immoral has been part of our culture for a very long time – so long that it can be hard to see the many consequences of these cultural values. To get an idea of how thoroughly such beliefs have pervaded our lives, take a minute to imagine what your life would be like if you had never experienced guilt or embarrassment or shame about your sexuality, your body or your fantasies. What would our lives be like if we were not limited by shame and negativity about sex?

In the last thirty years or so, there have been tremendous changes in how the world looks at sex. The “Sexual Revolution” of the sixties has engendered a more open discussion of sex, and the free exchange of a great deal more information – we doubt if you would have been able to read this book in the fifties. Our culture has also come to accept a much wider range of sexual behavior: sex outside of marriage is hardly controversial in most parts of the country; gay and lesbian lifestyles are openly accepted, and discrimination outlawed, in many areas. We hope that other alternative sexual behaviors will also someday gain such widespread

acceptance.

Meanwhile, in the world we live in today, where kink is often viewed with almost superstitious horror, how do cultural taboos affect the kinky person you know and love? What is life like in the kinky closet?

Feeling unseen. When we live in the closet we must keep secret a large part of our lives that is very important to us. We cannot discuss our relationships, our loves, our griefs and our triumphs outside our immediate network of kindred souls. At work, around our families of origin, or chatting with our neighbors or our friends at the PTA, we maintain a certain distance. We begin to feel kind of invisible.

Dossie remembers a time when she was working in a mental health agency and she realized that she had become so reluctant to talk about anything about sex, lest she betray her difference by saying something too outrageous, that the people around her believed her to be somewhat old-fashioned and conservative, possibly a prude. It was acutely uncomfortable to be treated like someone other than who she is, and yet, if she had openly discussed her lifestyle, it would have been shocking and disturbing to her coworkers.

So when we, as kinky people, spend significant time in non-kinky space, we may feel depressed, or that we are losing our identity, because we cannot communicate about what is important to us – or even honestly present ourselves to the people we are with.

Isn't it understandable that people would want to show pride in themselves by talking, even boasting a little, about their partners, spouses, families and loved ones? Kinky people, and other sexual minorities, don't get to do that. We become curiously silent when conversation turns to husbands, wives, dating and the like. You might imagine there is no love in our lives. You might even offer to

arrange blind dates for us. Many of you have.

Hiding your truth. And when we have to hide our truth, then how can we feel good about ourselves, how can we outgrow our cultural heritage of shame about our desires? All people in oppressed minorities get stuck having to deal with internalized oppression, which is that nasty voice within that learned a long time ago that we ought to be different from who we are, and keeps telling us that we are not okay. These messages are hard to overcome. And when we suspect that if our parents or kids or friends find out about our love lives they might treat us with disgust, we have an even harder time achieving any form of self-acceptance.

To my ex-boss:

I've given my heart and soul to this company. How many thousands of hours have I worked overtime to ensure that this three-person job is done correctly by one person? How many times have I had a friend pick up a sick child from school so that I could fulfill my position as second-in-command while you are traveling on business? How many ideas for grants have I been responsible for? And how many of those grants were successful? How many times have I listened to you moan and groan about the weight of work we are all expected to carry? You know the answers to these questions, yet after never having received a verbal or written warning, indeed, having been a model employee and receiver of numerous merit salary increases... you now see me as a "kink."

Why am I suddenly so hateful? Such a criminal? The person who found my e-mails on the internet server dislikes me, you know that! You know he is trying to hurt me in your eyes, as I have been your second-in-command for a long time now, and he would like that position. Yet you cannot see past the e-mails he has given you... the ones I wrote for only my Master's eyes. You never gave me a chance to try to explain, to share with you the joys I have found in his arms. You knew that I've been alone for thirteen years, a single parent of three. You've always supported me in times of difficulty. So why can you not try to understand me in a time of joy? You've told me how I deserve someone special, that there is that person who will love me out there. Yet, now that I have found these things, and more, you condemn me.

I feel sorry for you. Sorry that you cannot understand the strength and beauty of the relationship my Master and I share. It is not weakness, nor a longing to be under a man's power, that brought me here. In giving up control of myself, I gain control, for without me, he cannot fulfill his own dreams and desires. It is a circle we share, a power exchange. Neither of us loses; indeed, we are fulfilled beyond dreams.

How can I explain the wonder, the completeness I feel here? The man I call Master loves me more than I ever dreamed possible. He always puts me first, I am his prime concern, the one he just happens to own. What does that mean? I wish you would have asked. It means that I have given him control of myself, that he has overall responsibility... the last word on decision making. How can I do this? So very easily. You see, I am tired. So very tired, of being alone - struggling alone with a special needs child, and two more children who are brilliant. Of being the sole person responsible for finances, for making all of life's decisions. I can rest now, I can trust this person with my very life. Oh sure, I have a say. I have given up nothing and gained all.

You see, although I have given him control, there is much I retain. He does not exercise his control over my children, nor do

I over his. We discuss ideas, brainstorm, etc., as other couples do. We still have our arguments, and yes, there are times when I have a hard time with his choices. He listens to me, will never force me to accept his way. He wants me to be happier with him than I've ever been in my whole life. He does not demand from me, only taking what I give freely. In exchange, he has given me his love and complete trust. I am not less for having given him myself, indeed, now I am free to fly, free to love whole-heartedly, free to be.

I know you do not understand yet. I wish I could hear you ask "But why? How can you let him do things to you?" That's easy. I have always fantasized about being tied up. You see, if I am bound, well, I can enjoy myself, for whatever happens is not my fault, I have given up control. It is a way past the guilt that I have grown up with, the belief that a "good" woman does not enjoy herself sexually. I feel cared for, loved beyond my wildest expectations. And I've found some pain can be really erotic.

We have a trust... oh, how I wish you could feel what I feel. If he had not earned my complete trust, with his honesty and integrity, there is no way in hell he would ever have been allowed to tie me up, or to have me kneel at his feet. And no, this is not humiliating to me. Indeed, I love to look up at him and just smile. I am so happy to be there, next to him. We can talk about anything and everything, nothing is held back. He knows me better than I know myself, and has helped me to see the beauty he sees in me. I can look at him from across the room, and feel his complete love and respect, all in a simple glance. I melt with a look from him. He is my Forever Love. I just happen to call him Master.

I know, you are confused. This does not make sense to you. That's okay; what should matter is how I feel. I wish you could trust me enough to know that I would never be with someone who would harm me or my family, to know I am capable of making decisions for what is right for me. Just because you don't understand does not make this wrong. For me, it is so very right.

But you did not give me the chance to say these things to you. So, I am writing them here in the hopes that someday, maybe, you will be able to read this and understand. The world of D/s and BDSM includes millions of people: your children could end up here with me. I would hope that if life gives you another chance to accept someone who is different than you, that you will take it, grab it with both hands. For are not you a powerful woman? One who works with the "powers-that-be" in government, who has bemoaned the times you have been in meetings and your legs are looked at instead of your face? The one who believes that she accepts differences in others? Guess again. You are narrow-minded and a bigot. You still have much to learn, and I wish you well in your education.

Me,

the Best Damned Employee you said you ever had. The KINK.

When we choose to stop hiding, there is no middle ground. A kinky person who comes out of the closet becomes sensationally conspicuous. We are often accused of "flaunting it," but as long as there is so little public acceptance and understanding, there is actually no low-key way to be open about our lifestyle.

And why shouldn't we flaunt it? Aren't all of us proud of our relationships? Is it flaunting to walk down the aisle in a huge white

dress so everybody can celebrate our happiness? Is it flaunting to walk down that same aisle in a leather corset, which might better express our intentions? We look forward to the day when kinky people can walk down the street arm-in-arm like any other turned-on couple in love and people will smile and say “Look, aren’t they sweet.”

Confidentiality. There are real-world consequences of being out of the closet that go far beyond disapproving glances. We get arrested and convicted of sex crimes, we lose our jobs, our homes, our children and our families. We can lose our financial security defending ourselves from criminal charges or hostile divorces. And all for behavior that harms no one.

Some years back a married couple, very wonderful kinky friends of ours, lived in the closet in a small city where they sincerely enjoyed their work as high school teachers. The police found out about their personal lives, searched their home, confiscated their toys, their costumes and their play furniture, and splashed their names all over the front pages of newspapers statewide. They were professionally ruined, even though the kids they taught knew nothing about their private life until the police and the headlines told them. Newspaper articles featured quotes from school parents: “But they seemed like such nice people!” Well, that’s true, we know them – they *are* genuinely very nice people.

Why did these nice people have to give up their professional lives? Why were they not allowed to be good teachers, to make a contribution to those high school kids? Even being in the closet wasn’t enough to protect them from prosecution.

This means something very important for you, our reader. When your friend with the unusual sexual lifestyle confides in you, he is demonstrating great trust in you. If you betray his confidentiality, if you gossip about him, if you complain about him, you might be

endangering him in very concrete ways. If this is a person you care about, please be careful about his safety.

A culture in the closet. Inside the S/M closet, the sexual minority's "ghetto," you may be surprised to learn that there is a large and very active community. Most major cities in the U.S. have a variety of support groups for people of alternative sexualities. The Resource Guide in the back of this book lists some of them.

These groups function as clubs, usually screening their members and requiring a membership fee and attendance at an orientation before an individual can become a full member. Some of these support groups restrict their membership to a particular population by gender and/or orientation, like some lesbian and gay male groups. Still others specialize in particular behaviors like spanking, particular forms of drag like cross-dressing or baby clothes, or particular fetishes like cigar-smoking or high-heeled shoes.

The larger and more active clubs typically offer meetings once or twice a month, discussion groups, a newsletter and/or a web page, and access to a lot of volunteer work, which is a great way to make new friends and keep that newsletter coming out. These clubs protect their membership lists and have a very high regard for confidentiality.

Support group program meetings often feature a guest speaker, who might offer information and a demonstration of a particular kinky activity, such as how to do rope bondage or use an English cane. The speakers are usually experienced players who are willing to hand down what they have learned to those with less experience, and so club meetings offer the member an opportunity to listen to and meet veteran players who already do whatever it might be that a newer member would like to try.

The S/M "lecture/demo" in certain circles has become an art form in itself, offering technical information about safety, materials

and technique in a theatrical atmosphere, culminating in a brief demonstration/performance.

Another meeting might feature a speaker leading a discussion: communication in S/M scenes, incorporating play personae into real-world relationships, or even how to come out to your family and friends. Some groups alternate between discussion and demos so all the important stuff gets covered.

The first purpose of a support group meeting is to offer a safe and supportive space in which its members can talk about and learn about kinkiness. People do meet potential partners at support group meetings, but intrusive cruising is considered rude. A support group is not usually designed to be a meat market.

This brings us back to what we mentioned before: one of the first difficulties all of us run into when we decide to expand our sexual lifestyles is that we have little or no language that feels safe and is explicit enough to be accurate, in which to describe to another person what it is that we would like to share with them. One of the tremendous benefits of joining a support group and attending meetings is that the members get together and talk about their sexuality, and so everyone gets to practice finding language that works to express themselves.

Support groups may also put on parties, social events, potlucks: Halloween is a favorite time. Social events are often held as fundraisers for a member who has had an accident or is dealing with serious illness or needs financial support for legal defense: the community works to take care of its own.

In some major cities, informational workshops are put on by small business specializing in sex and kink education, usually advertised in the gay papers or whichever local papers carry the “wild side” personal ads. Such workshops do not require membership, but just a fee to attend, and are a great way for people

to check out some information about kink without taking the larger step of joining a group or community. The workshop leaders, again, routinely demonstrate their skills while providing information about how things work, safety and technique.

People who attend workshops and support group meetings are not required to participate in any kinky activities unless they choose to; in these environments it is okay to watch.

Play parties. Some kinkyfolk like to gather together for play parties, which means that a group of people, usually from a carefully controlled guest list, get together at someone's house or studio to do kinky play as a group. The places where we play are often set up with special furniture or equipment that you wouldn't find in most homes – bondage tables, slings, cages and the like. Play parties usually have set rules about safer sex and the etiquette that works to respect each other's personal space in an environment that Miss Manners doesn't cover. Many people arrive at play parties with a plan to play a particular scene with one or more partners – others come solo to meet people and perhaps have a new adventure. Because the same group of people tend to come back to the same parties, a protective community can be formed, and play with new people is very safe with your friends all around you.

What do we get out of this? Along with indulging any taste we may have to show off, we also get to see what other people do. Deprivatizing sex changes a lot of things: people, relationships, even cultures. When you can see how other people enjoy their sex life, how gorgeous they look when they have an orgasm, you get powerful permission to explore and enjoy your own sexuality. And sometimes, other people see you and they may tell you afterward how wonderful you were. Positive support for sexuality doesn't have to be a rare thing.

Cloaked black leather,
speaking in code
about sadomasochism

Your sister tries to decipher,
Stroking smooth nude photographs
her tongue grasps for words from unfamiliar territory

Goose-bumps give way
shoulders rise,
her breathing stops...
"What is the Exiles" - she asks
"A group" - I answer

Your knee nudges mine,
under the restaurant table
Sushi and sesame seeds,
barriers between my teeth,
keeping the truth from escaping

Your eyes fall half-open,
chin rising, eyebrows peering
You leer at me.
Heavy, piercing, and blank,
your eyes shoot what you don't
want me to say

You warned - Don't talk about the floggers
because it would then out you too.
Not ready to expose your own raw sexuality
you attempted to silence me

My therapist asked
if I subconsciously wanted to spite you...

Last night
Black heavy floggers
draped over the white cotton couch
- toys, festive instruments -
seen but not a word spoken

not a glance
not a pause
no "avoid-the subject-conversation"
I was impressed by your sister's skill to deny the truth revealed

and Relieved,
My chest rose,
shoulders broaden
feet widen and face relaxed
The tight dense fog transferred to her.

Leather bars. The gay male kink scene, and to some degree the lesbian scene as well, does a great deal of its socializing, support and cruising in bars set up and advertised (in newspapers in big cities, by word-of-mouth in small ones) for this purpose.

Such bars were for many years the only way for kinky men to meet each other, and are still vitally important in the men's leather community. Most have a main room for socializing and cruising,

and many have a back room set up with some equipment for spur-of-the-moment play. They often host special events in which people with a particular interest (bondage, watersports, a desire for a particular body type such as large or hairy bodies, a fondness for a particular role-play such as cowboys) can meet one another. Most leather bars also host fund-raisers for political causes pertinent to the kin communities, such as supporting gay-positive and kink-positive politicians or making donations to charities such as AIDS support or women's health services.

The Internet. In recent years many kinkyfolk have found a safe place to talk about their desires on the Internet. The 'Net is a special boon to people who live in isolated areas where they can't attend programs or meetings, and to people for whom even the tiny risk of being "outed" (e.g., revealed to the outside world as kinky) is too great a chance to take.

People on the Internet can obtain a great deal of information about their kink from the World Wide Web, where many experienced practitioners share their own knowledge and experience and point the reader toward other good sources of information. Netfolk can also share their thoughts "bulletin-board" style in various forums, including Usenet newsgroups and kink areas sponsored by some websites and Internet service providers.

Many people's first experiments with kink take place in the cyber-forum of a "chat room," where they type their ideas and communications into the keyboard and someone possibly thousands of miles away can read their message simultaneously, like a telephone conversation. It's not unusual for people to form very devoted kinky relationships on-line with folks who live across the globe and whom they have never seen face-to-face. In such relationships, one partner may give the other directions about a particular kinky activity to try out at home, then report back on how

it felt – many people who have never done S/M in the real world have been “cyber-slaves,” or “cyber-masters,” a relatively safe way to experiment with the emotions of intense play for those who are too scared or too new or too committed to an existing relationship for anything more tangible.

The ‘Net has brought untold thousands of people into the kink community by giving them a safe way to experiment and to find like-minded people near them. The “munch,” a social get-together of like-minded kinkyfolk from the Internet who meet in a restaurant for no-pressure chatting and flirting, has become one of the commonest kinky events.

A deeply closeted friend of Catherine’s discovered on the ‘Net that a woman he’d worked with for over a decade shared his interest in spanking. Their friendship has now attained a level of intimacy that it never had before.

Professional dominants. Part of our sexual underground is a skilled cadre of women, and a few men, who earn a living helping their clients enact their kinky fantasies. These “pro-dommes” (short for professional dominants, or dominatrixes) are probably the part of our world that is most visible to most outsiders, through (usually inaccurate) representations in movies, television and novels. They are an important link between our world and yours.

The client who would risk the loss of his job, family or status if his kinky desires became known can visit a reputable pro-domme in complete confidentiality, safe in the knowledge that she will respect his personal boundaries and his physical and emotional limits. A client who is already in a happy kinky relationship may ask a pro-domme for help in enacting fantasies that are beyond the limits or skills of his current partner, often with that partner’s enthusiastic support and perhaps even his or her participation.

Dear Mother,

Have I told you lately that I really appreciate all that you are and all that you have done for me? I know my teenage years were hard for you... I look back and I think I could have been a better daughter... but with circumstances as they were, I did the best I could. And you did too.

It's a rare mother who can let go as you have, to let me make my own decisions without censoring me. You've always given me unconditional love and support... a belief that I have all the tools to face life and make my own decisions. You know, I think about it now and I seem to have become you in a sense. In my earliest memories, you were always working on beating writing deadlines, dickering with editors, driving your assistants mad, being a lousy homemaker and a brilliant thinker, following your own passions, relentlessly teaching and always, always an individual. I laughed the other day when my assistant was bothering me to get some sleep as I was working on a article deadline. Hey, guess what? I fought so hard to rebel against you and I've become just like you. And I'm really proud of that!

I know you've been wondering what I do for a living. You're also too self-aware not to know what questions should not be asked. I appreciate your discretion for your own heart. But I would like to tell you what I do for fun as a career and private expression. Here... let me read you my company mission statement: "My professional and personal mission is to provide a safe space, physically, mentally, and emotionally, for people to experience their limits or desires." I give people the chance to let go of the burdens that society piles upon their shoulders. Like Shinto priests who stand beneath the ice-cold waterfalls of the Japanese Alps, some of my clients and friends come to me looking for a physical experience that is so challenging, it forces them to be one with the self for the first time. Others come to me to be treated as the precious creatures that they are. I do all of this out of love for humanity. I also do this because I was a bratty kid and I still am. I like teasing and playing. You know me, I've never been one to sit still.

Another thing I really like about my work and play is that I get to wear all sorts of fabulous clothes. You'll have to visit my high heel collections. Knowing the kind of boots you wore in the '60s, you'll love the ones I have. I just know it!

Let me take you out to lunch some time and to some of my favorite stores. I'll take you around shopping like you used to take me shopping at Takashi-maya! You'll love it! Hey, and maybe that new guy you've been dating would like some of my fashion advice to you!

Love

a rebel just like you!

Your daughter,

M

Many professional dominants run their own businesses, with their own play spaces and equipment. Others group together in establishments that offer the potential client a selection of partners and environments. A few such establishments also offer professional submissives, who play with selected clients under close supervision to ensure their safety.

Although professional dominants earn an hourly rate that is on a

par with many highly paid professions, their annual income is rarely anywhere near at the level you might suppose. Most see only a few clients a week, and must spend a great deal of money on obtaining and maintaining equipment, toys and fetish wardrobes.

Pro-dominants occupy a shadow world between legality and illegality. Most do not offer conventional sexual services, partly to help protect them against prostitution laws, and perhaps also because that boundary feels more comfortable. However, the definition of a sexual act varies widely from one state to another, and often includes activities like erotic spanking that most people don't think of as sex. Professional dominants may also be susceptible to arrest under statutes outlawing things like "lewd and lascivious behavior" or "running a disorderly house."

Many pro-dominants are among the most respected players in our communities – teachers, writers and educators. They also serve an important purpose in helping their clients overcome shame and guilt about their desires, and enabling them to make contact with support groups and other community resources.

Conferences and events. Events and conferences, from local to international in scale, are so frequent that nobody can go to all of them.

Dossie recently attended a workshop in Nebraska for newcomers to S/M, where she was Mistress of Ceremonies to a talent show, performed poetry, and led two workshops. One workshop was on S/M dynamics in relationships, an in-depth discussion of the different ways people manage to figure out whose turn it is to make the coffee in the morning when the person they live with is sometimes referred to as Master – or more seriously, just how far do you want the roles you like to play in the bedroom to affect the rest of your life?

Dossie's other workshop was on bondage and ropes. This was a

more practical workshop, where several experienced people brought a whole lot of rope and helped everyone figure out how to tie each other up with it. This range of experience is typical of BDSM conferences.

Other events are title contests, where individuals compete for titles like Mr. San Antonio Leather or Ms. Oklahoma Drag King. Local contests may be held in bars or clubs, and feature entertainment and lots of costumes and silliness – most are held as fundraisers for a local charity. This structure provides an nice milieu for kinky people to gather, get to know each other, be creative and outrageous on a stage, and generate a positive presence in the larger community by making a sizable donation to a charitable organization.

Local titleholders may go on to compete in larger national or international events. The granddaddy of leather events is International Mr. Leather, which annually fills up a large number of hotels in its host city, and generates parties that go on for ten days. The winners of these contests are expected to justify their fame by producing and hosting lots more events and fundraisers.

Kinky conferences usually include entertainment, play parties and how-to workshops, and many opportunities to make friends and meet experienced players. Major events usually have a vendor area, where participants can buy books and magazines, fashion and toys, and meet the craftspeople who serve their community.

What about young people? For legal and ethical reasons, virtually all these wonderful supportive kinky environments are open only to adults. Where, then, does that leave the young person whose fantasies about kinky behavior are strong, but who is too young to enact these fantasies? Kids are encountering images of alternative sexuality at a much earlier age these days. Unlike your authors, they don't have to struggle with nameless desires for years

or decades – they know the names of those desires, and they’re speaking freely about them. (Good!)

Remember – talking about something, or fantasizing about it, is not the same as doing it. Catherine remembers fantasizing about spanking and bondage from an age as early as four, but did not enact those fantasies until her late twenties. We hope that the teenager with kinky desires will find a group of like-minded, or at least sympathetic, people with whom he can talk freely about his evolving sexuality. Many cities offer support groups for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered teens, and we would hope that such groups would also offer support for teen members of other sexual minorities. Support groups for BDSM and other alternative sexualities now exist on a handful of college campuses; more, we presume, will evolve in the future. There are also a couple of good websites, notably Scarleteen (www.scarleteen.com), which provide support and information for young people’s sexuality.

We have developed our own culture. If you attended some of these conferences and events, you would discover that in the ghettos of the extreme sexual minorities there has developed a fascinating culture, with its own literature, publications, stores, businesses, craftspeople and artists.

Craftspeople are very important to the kinky community, as the costumes and toys that we use to live out our fantasies are usually not available at regular department stores. Craftspeople and artisans in leather, rubber and chain create clothing, costumes, corsets and fetishwear, all of it designed for use in a sexual context, and for the wearer to express how each sees him- or herself as a sexual person. Toys – restraints, bondage cuffs, blindfolds, dildos and whips in an enormous variety of materials, colors, textures and styles – facilitate infinite possibilities for sexual exploration.

The making of sex toys is a high art in this community; sleazy

stuff is not welcome, as most people value their sex lives, and do not want their costumes and toys to be poorly made junk such as is found in many porn stores.

From our love of well-crafted leathers and toys, stores have opened to sell the works of craftspeople – leather stores have become so common that there is a well-known boutique in the airport in Frankfurt, Germany. (A strange sight to see if you have been traveling, like one of our authors, without your leathers and toys for fear of being hassled crossing borders on a European trip.)

In the visual arts, well-known artists like Robert Mapplethorpe have taken S/M and kinky imagery into the mainstream. Other artists are well-known within the kinky community: we recently attended a show of S/M art at San Francisco's Gay and Lesbian Historical Society. S/M themes show up in the work of mainstream artists like Leonor Fini and Masami Teraoka, and out-of-the-closet artists like Tom of Finland and Fish explore explicit imagery of fantasy and roleplaying, offering in their art a profound understanding of sexual communication within the sexual minority ghetto.

Fashion designers Gianni Versace and Jean-Paul Gaultier openly display S/M clothing, while fashion photographer Helmut Newton has created an entire kinky style of presenting clothes.

Kinky people have a particular affinity for the performing arts, given our love of psychodrama in our private lives, and we have seen theater, dance and spoken word performance in cities as different as New York and Omaha, in theaters both within and expanding out of the sexual underground.

French philosopher Michel Foucault took the theory of sexuality, informed by S/M, to the heights of logical abstraction, and was one of the major voices of twentieth century philosophy.

In literature, Anne Rice (under her pseudonyms A. N.

Roquelaure and Anne Rampling) writes intense S/M fantasy, and Pauline Reage's Story of O has been a classic since it was first presented to the French Academy in 1958. Within the present kink community, there is an enormous amount of writing being published, both erotic and philosophical/political/psychological, about and from the point of view of sexual variation. Several publishing houses have evolved to serve the needs of a community hungry for fact and fiction about its own lifestyles. Certain distributors specialize in delivering these books to bookstores all over the country, either gay/lesbian bookstores or erotic boutiques, so that information is available wherever you may be looking for it. (Information about good books to read and how to find them will be found in the Resource Guide at the back of this book.) What a contrast to your authors' childhoods, when we couldn't find any books about sex at all!

I don't care that you know I'm kinky. I don't care that you know I'm a pervert. Those are who am, but it's not important to me that you know those things.

I want you to know how close I've come to telling you before.

I want you to know how much I hate lying to you in any form.

I want you to know how important this is to me, how I've risked friendships, my marriage, everything at some time or other over this.

I don't need you to see the bruises, but if you do see them, I want you to know they were put there out of love, not anger.

I want you to know how hard I work at being and staying safe. I've learned more about the human body and psyche this way than in any of my classes at school.

I want you to know how brave I've been, and continue to be. I want you to know how hard it was to ask the first questions, how hard it was to accept these things about me, how hard it is to do each new thing.

I don't need you to know all the "gory details." But I would like to know we don't have to avoid major topics in conversation.

I want you to know how much I've hurt and been hurt, how much I wanted to share my pain with you.

I want you to know it's all been worth it, the good parts, the bad parts, the easy parts and the hard parts. All of it. I want you to know who my heroes are, I want you to know why I look up to them. I want you to know how I felt when I found out I was someone's hero.

I want you to know how much I've learned about who I am, what I want, and what I need from my life.

I want you to know how this has almost ended my marriage, more than once, not because he doesn't understand but because he does.

I want you to know that our marriage has lasted because he understands. I want you to know that we have chosen to work it out, how we have chosen to work it out. And that it is in fact working.

I want you to know some of the special people in my life, and just what their places are in my life. I want to be able to share how much it hurts when they leave.

I want you to know I am hardly ever ashamed of my body anymore. I want you to know what a wonderful feeling that is.

I want you to know where I go sometimes, whether it's a play party with friends, a workshop I am leading, or a convention with hundreds of other people like me. I know you know I march in the Gay Pride parades. I want you to know which group I walk with. I want you to know how much I wish you were on the sidewalk, watching.

I want you to know I've found where I belong.

W

Our point here is that kinky people live in an underground community that is rich and productive, generating art and discourse of its own and exerting a major influence on art and philosophy outside of the boundaries of the sexual minority's ghetto: our voices carry very far "beyond the pale." The three largest public events in California, where we live, are the Rose Bowl, the San Francisco Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/ Transgendered Freedom Day Pride Parade,

and the Folsom Street Fair. This last, which attracts a couple of hundred thousand attendees every year, takes place in San Francisco's South of Market "Miracle Mile," home of leather bars, sex clubs, art galleries and performance spaces serving the sexual underground. (The mainstream newspapers here in San Francisco usually give the Fair a couple of column inches of space.)

Indeed, so complete a community and culture exists within our pale that many of us have very little contact with the mainstream world. Those of us who live in the sexual underground have entire social and extended family networks ready to take care of all of our needs; businesses, places of employment, neighborhoods where nobody stares when we walk by no matter what we are wearing. One publisher in our community maintains a list of Kink Aware Professionals, listing therapists, doctors and dentists who are "S/M friendly" in many cities in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and the Far East.

We even have our own museum: Chicago's Leather Archives and Museum now houses valuable historical documents and displays from our community's past and present.

Why we feel safer in a ghetto. Because nobody will offer us a hard time. Many kinky people feel safer within the boundaries of our subculture, and more free to expand and refine our understanding and expression of our sexuality and our selves. There is very little space for our exploration in the mainstream culture.

This can be hard to understand, so let's look at an example. Dossie writes and performs poetry with intense erotic and philosophical themes, and she has no desire to perform in the larger culture, even though she might make more money. The difference is about being understood. Audiences in the underground understand what she is saying, and are able to listen and respond with enthusiasm. A mainstream audience would be (and, on occasion, has

been) so shocked by her content that they wouldn't really hear her, and certainly would not be able to respond with enthusiasm. So inside the ghetto, she can develop her art and get feedback from those who read and hear her. Outside, she is regarded as an embarrassing freak.

The more we live in our community, the less we know about what is mainstream. We become a strange kind of foreigner, ostracized from the larger culture in which we live, encapsulated. Dossie has never lived in the mainstream as an adult, which is one reason why she seems old-fashioned when she tries: the "straight" culture she remembers living in was in the fifties. Some of us become "disculturated," unfamiliar with the "regular" way, which means that when we visit you, our friends and family who are not of the sexual underground, we wind up feeling like a fish out of water, not knowing how to act or understanding the underlying meaning of interactions around us. How forbidden is it to be gay these days? Are lesbians more widely accepted than they used to be? Is it okay to joke about things like spanking and bondage? We don't know.

If you visit in our culture, come perhaps to one of our art openings or theater performances, or the Folsom Street Fair, you too will feel like a fish out of water. Surrounded by people wearing odd bits of leather and chains, sporting tattoos and piercings and scarifications, or perhaps exquisitely tailored military uniforms, you might feel shocked, frightened, awkward and unsure of yourself.

A few years ago, Catherine's mother was kind and brave enough to join Catherine for a panel discussion at a San Francisco S/M club on the topic of "S/M and Families." As she followed Catherine around San Francisco's South of Market neighborhood, past the leather stores and bars, past the men in leathers and the women in crew cuts, her eyes got bigger and bigger. The program itself was held in a gay men's sex club that the support group had rented for

the evening, an industrial space featuring individual booths for sexual activity, bondage equipment, rafters strung with discarded boots, and large safer-sex posters featuring muscular and erect young men stroking their latex-clad genitals. Mom – who handled the program like the pro she is, and was invited by several less fortunate kinkyfolk to come be *their* mother too – had a chance to learn firsthand what it feels like to be in an environment so very different from her own, and has had a whole new appreciation for the gap between sexual cultures since then.

Put yourself in that position, and remember: that's how we feel when we visit the mainstream culture that you take for granted: we feel frightened, awkward and unsure.

8

Coming To Terms

How do you, how does anyone, come to terms with your friend's sexual experience when it is way beyond the boundaries of anything you ever expected to find near you – nothing you ever expected you would have any need whatsoever to deal with, to learn about, to accept? Most of us have been taught that any sex, much less kinkiness, is embarrassing and disgusting. But now we are faced with someone – a friend, a lover, a member of the family – that we know and love, and we don't want to hurt him, or lose his friendship.

This section will help you in deciding what your own feelings are about the kink of your friend or relative, and in clarifying your own boundaries.

Permission. Start by giving yourself permission to not like, not want, not feel erotic about anything that you may be hearing from your kinky friend that is shocking and difficult for you. It's not your job to like every single fantasy or role-play or sexual behavior that you hear about. All that is asked of you is that you find a neutral position.

Now might be a good time to turn back to Chapter Two, if you need to. Take a few minutes to breathe, relax, and remember the wonderful things about your kinky friend or relative.

The other side of this same coin is important to note here. Since our culture has stereotyped kinky people as self-destructive sickos, it can be a startling revelation to discover that a person that you love and respect and know to be a healthy and worthwhile human being is into kinky sex. Dossie recalls what a shock it was to meet Cynthia Slater, co-founder of the Society of Janus, twenty-five years ago:

“I had always been aware of fantasies about bondage and kidnapping, but had thought them to be about an unhealthy, not-yet-reconstructed part of my pre-feminist self. Cynthia was a woman with whom I had a great deal in common: she was intelligent, outspoken and outrageous. So here was this woman whom I liked and respected (and found extremely attractive) who was actually doing all those forbidden things that were in my fantasies! I had a revelation. Maybe I, too, could try out some of those forbidden sexualities from my dreams and still be a strong and healthy person. And so I did, and so I am.”

You may find that you need to give yourself permission to acknowledge kinky themes in your own fantasies or your desires. Once again, give yourself permission to feel how you feel, and be who you are. You may never act on such fantasies, or you may try them out at some other time – there is no rush. Coming to terms with your friend’s kink does not mean you have to join him, and if you find yourself with some desire to do so, you can give yourself all the time you like to think about that, gather information, and make up your own mind for yourself. And if you decide, as many do quite happily, to keep your kink in fantasy only, then perhaps this book, or what you hear from your kinky friend, may enrich your fantasy life, and we think this is a good thing too.

Continue to give yourself permission to have your feelings – give your gut responses some respectful attention, and be kind to yourself. You can safely own your feelings and learn from them as long as you don't blame yourself or anyone else for those feelings being there inside you. They are simply your feelings, part of you and your unique character and history.

Setting limits. Another important thing to know about coming to terms with information about your kinky person's alternative sexual behaviors is that *you get to set your own limits*.

For example, you might find that you're perfectly OK with hearing that your daughter likes bondage – but that hearing the details of exactly how she likes to get tied up and what happens next is simply too much, that it feels too intimate or too scary to hear that information. We think it's extremely important that you communicate your discomfort to her, and set clear limits about what information you want and don't want to be given.

Many kinkyfolk talk among themselves in a very forthright and uninhibited manner, and it's easy for us to forget that the rest of the world may not feel comfortable with such frank talk. Please, if your kinky person is telling you more than you want to know, or using language that feels uncomfortable to you, say so. Be as clear as you can about exactly what it is that's bothering you and how she can avoid it in the future. If you can, make it clear that it isn't her kinky behavior that's upsetting you, it's that she's giving you more information than you're ready to hear right now. We think she'd much rather have you state your limits clearly than have you simply stop communicating at all because you're feeling overwhelmed.

You may also discover that what worries you is not so much that *you're* upset by how your kinky person is talking, but what other people might think – especially if those other people are important in your life, your neighbors or co-workers or parents. This may be a

special concern if your kinky person is very “out” and public in his desires (“Wasn’t that your son Tim I saw at the Folsom Street Fair on the news last night?”)

You may never choose to hear the details, and that’s okay too. Your friend or family member needs to know that you still care for and respect him as a human being, not that you ardently desire an instant education in the joys of perversion. Even if your kinky person is your lover, spouse, mate or partner, which we will discuss in detail soon... *even* in this difficult case... you still get to choose how much you feel you can take in at any given time. It probably took your kinky friend some period of time to get comfortable enough to speak easily about what she does. You can reassure yourself by asking your friend about his learning process: “Didn’t you have a hard time with this the first time you heard it?” Chances are he did – sexual sophisticates are made, not born.

Pay attention to your own reactions. What shocks you the most? What your friend does? That he is not ashamed? That she talks about it in language that you’ve never heard before except as an insult? That your friend is out of the closet and lots of people know about his lifestyle, and what will the neighbors think if your kinky person shows up at your house for dinner in leather and studs? Knowing specifically what’s bothering you today makes it easier to set limits: “I’d like to invite you to dinner, but I’m embarrassed and I feel distant from you if you come in costume, and I worry about what the neighbors will say to me.”

You can be an open-minded person and still have a right to protection about your own feelings, and to set limits like, perhaps, “Could we please not discuss this over the dinner table?” When Dossie’s daughter was in junior high and high school, they agreed to keep the house in such a way that neither Dossie’s kink nor her lesbian relationship were visible to her daughter’s friends who came

to visit. Dossie figured her daughter had a right to a home she could bring her friends to without having to admit how different her family was.

One issue that many people have concerns about personal appearance and dress codes. Kinky people often like to celebrate their sexuality by wearing clothes, tattoos and body jewelry that make their lifestyle preferences all too obvious to the observer; we take a lot of pride in the creative ways we have found to express ourselves and our accomplishments through our appearance. What this means to you, is that to ask a kinky person to wear ordinary clothing can amount to asking us to pretend to be somebody else. Many butch or androgynous women have similar problems: for them, wearing a dress and stockings and heels may feel excruciatingly uncomfortable and embarrassing – just as embarrassing as it would be for a non-crossdressing man to have to dress this way. To be obliged to wear ordinary clothes may constitute a denial of their identity, a stark message that “the way you are is not acceptable.”

Dear Mom and Dad,

I'm writing to tell you about a part of my life that has been very important to me for some time now - I'm only now finding the confidence to tell you about it. Throughout our history together, I'm sure you've noticed my reluctance about telling you things of my life. It took me forever to tell you I was trans, even though you took it relatively well. I'm always afraid of losing your love, as so many I've known have lost their families permanently.

I'm sure you've noticed signs throughout my life - from about age 17 or so. You'll have to forgive me if I'm vague here - my stomach is turning, imagining your reaction. I'm not sure if I should tell you straight out or work my way in slow. I think I'll go slow. First off: everything I do is done between consenting adults. It takes place between caring people who are not abusive or cruel.

I suppose that probably tells you what you want to know, hm? Dad, I know you've mentioned this, and we've had oblique conversations about it. One of my sexual practices is commonly known as BDSM. Before you flip out - please re-read that previous paragraph. It's all consenting. The people I play with care about me deeply, and I care about them just as deeply.

Dad, I know you've got concerns about this kind of sexual activity being abusive and unhealthy, and nothing I can say to you in this letter can change that. I can only hope that, through talking to you, and showing you that I am not harming myself, that you'll trust my judgement, and see that you've raised me to be an intelligent, thoughtful person.

I can't explain to you "why" I do it, or why it feels good. I'm not even going to try. What does matter is that I feel it is important enough to share with you. I want you two to share the wonderful things in my life, and to keep abreast of my life. I've hidden this for long enough, and I'm hoping to keep your love through this.

I don't practice BDSM because I hate myself. The feelings I get from playing are positive and self-affirming - like any other healthy lovemaking. The people I play with are highly intelligent, and have thought about sexuality, and safety, and regard both of those as important.

I encourage you to contact me - we can talk to your satisfaction. I'm sorry I didn't have the courage to tell you about this face to face - I hope you can forgive me for that concern of losing you.

Mom, Dad, I want to reassert that I love you both from the bottom of my heart. You are the people who have had the greatest impact on my life, and you are, and always will be, a vital part of my life.

I love you both,

K

Of course, it may also be unacceptable to you to go to the supermarket with your kinky friend cross-dressed, in leather and chains. You both have good reasons to be the way you are, which is different from each other.

Compromise may be the only friendly solution: "How about you wear what you want to when I come over to your house and I'll try to get used to it: I don't want to make you feel bad but drag in

public is too embarrassing for me right now.”

If you have a hard time finding a way to state your limits, try phrasing what you want in terms of your own feelings. Avoid making the other person wrong. When you state your needs or concerns without blaming, your friend can hear you without defensiveness. Note that the sample statements we have given are entirely about the speaker’s feelings, and include no judgments about your friend’s lifestyle or customs.

Remember, what you’re comfortable with today may change later. Set up your agreements in terms of what you feel or need today, right now, leaving open the possibility of change in the future.

What are your rights? Ask yourself how much right you think you have to control your kinky person’s behavior. Depending on your relationship, that might be none at all, or quite a lot.

First, do your homework. We believe that no one has a right to vote on the physical, emotional or moral safety of lifestyles and sexual behavior they do not fully comprehend. Certainly, you, dear reader, get the moral high ground here, because by taking the trouble to read this book you are educating yourself. (*Most commendable.* We have too often read scathing condemnations of kink in psychological, philosophical or feminist writings and, when we check the bibliography, we discover that the author has read nothing, no books, no articles, written by people who engage in these sexual expressions. This sort of deliberate ignorance is inexcusable.)

Ask yourself what your goals are. To deepen your relationship with your kinky person? To change your friend? To avoid hearing about stuff that makes your hair stand on end? To become less distressed about that same stuff? To be more open and accepting about diverse sexualities? When you have identified your goals,

resist any temptation to blame yourself for not already having achieved them, and think about how you might get from where you are today to where you would like to be tomorrow by taking one step at a time.

If your feelings against your kinky person's lifestyle are so strong you find you can't get over them or get comfortable in a neutral stance, it would be worthwhile to invest in a little therapy or counseling before giving up on your valued relationship entirely. Exposure to such forbidden information can have powerful effects, from memories of childhood traumas to realizing that some of your own fantasies would qualify as kinky. Your friend or family member may even know some therapists who are knowledgeable and open-minded about kink, or you can learn how to find such a therapist from the Resource Guide of this book. You could have some support in working through your own emotional response to kinkiness from a neutral person, save your relationship, and maybe even get a chance to heal some of your old wounds.

But suppose this is someone over whose life you really do exert some control, such as your young-adult child. We all know that our children, once they are grown, get to choose their own lives – whatever hopes we, as their parents, may have had for them. But what if you're putting them through college or graduate school, or supporting them as they launch their lives? What if they're living at home with you? Will you kick them out, or cut them off, if you disapprove of their lifestyle?

We hope not. And we also think it wouldn't work. One of the reasons kinky people have developed such an active and rich underground culture is that many of us, like gay and lesbian and transgendered people, have been rejected by our families, and possibly been thrown out of our churches, schools, professions and careers, by those who disapprove of our sex lives. Please do not

imagine that you can force your kinky person to change her ways by yanking on the purse strings or threatening to withdraw your love and approval. You will lose that person sooner or later, along with whatever love and intimacy you once shared. If you are so angry that you are willing to take these risks, or would rather disconnect completely from that person than learn to accept him, that is a choice you get to make. From where we sit, that looks like a very sad choice. You would lose your kinky person, and she would lose you.

To my family,

I know you do not understand me and you ask me questions and say you miss the old me. I love you all very much as much as I always have. But you see, for so many many years I was unhappy inside... even if it never came out even if I never showed it I was lonely and frustrated and at times I felt I was crazy. I would have these thoughts of finding someone that would give me what I needed as a woman. What I needed seemed to be so much different than what every other woman I knew seemed to need. I thought there was something wrong with me and what I was thinking was evil or bad. I suppressed it all of my life.

Thirty-five years is a long time to live as an adult with hidden feelings locked inside your soul. I am now fifty-one years old and saw my life before me empty and unfulfilled. There were times I would lay my head on my pillow and the tears would slowly edge out of my eyes silently, a desire so strong and a longing so great that it would actually hurt.

But now I must tell you all that I am very happy, very content. For the first time in my life as an adult I feel free, I feel complete, the inner conflict I had for so long with my secret feelings is gone. Yet I still must keep myself hidden from you. This is very hard to do, in many ways I have had to pull back from you. I love you all very much.

I wish there were just some way you could understand how this kind of life is not so strange or sick as you would see it... but that it is a deep and caring relationship between two people who just happen to enjoy the same kind of sexuality and individual roles in their partnership. I know you have seen a difference in me and wonder what it is that I have changed. But if you could only understand that the change has brought me to a place in my life where I can finally BE ME.

I still love you all very much. Your sister, daughter, mother and friend,

N

What if you're afraid he's being harmed? It can be very worrisome to know that the apple of your eye is being tied up or spanked or ordered around – even if you know he's enjoying it tremendously. Our natural protective instincts tend to kick in if we feel that there's even the slightest chance that someone we care about is being harmed in any way.

The good news is that most kinkyfolk indulge their kinks

without causing the slightest bit of harm to themselves or the people around them. Our play involves the pretend thrills of kids' cops-and-robbers games, and the occasional mild bruise or scrape of kids' playground sports – nothing more. If your friend or relative seems healthy and happy, he undoubtedly is exactly that.

We have seen our kinky friends become permanently estranged from their families because a well-meaning relative tried to break up a relationship which looked scary, harmful or excessive from the outside, but which was happy, consensual and a source of great joy to the people in it. Please don't let this happen to you and your kinky friend or relative. As we've mentioned before, just because a behavior or a relationship doesn't look like fun to you doesn't mean it's not lots of fun for the participants. They probably wouldn't want to live the way *you* do, either; there's room for all kinds of relationships and activities in this big old world.

It can be tempting, too, to blame everything that goes wrong in your friend or relative's life – every domestic argument, every problem at work, every rebellion by a child – on her kink. Before you make such a hasty judgment, please stop and consider all the things that go wrong in your life, or in *anybody's* life – even in the lives of celibate people or longtime heterosexual vanilla monogamous couples. Kink doesn't solve all of anybody's problems, and it doesn't cause them either.

One difficulty is that from the outside, it can be hard to see a clear-cut line between consensual kink and nonconsensual spousal abuse. Domestic violence certainly happens to the kinky and the non-kinky alike: how, then, can you tell the difference between consensual kinkiness and abuse?

Well, first of all, you can ask your friend how *he* distinguishes: a lot of kinky players have put some serious thought into this matter, so you might get some enlightening answers. You can ask her how

she maintains her safety, and listen for the concepts of safe, sane and consensual. We vote for clean and sober, too. Sometimes you can't know – lots of nonkinky people are rude or hostile or controlling to their partners, and even the experts aren't always sure where to draw the line between obnoxious and abusive.

Or you may fear that your friend is so wildly enthusiastic about his newfound sexual utopia that he is going overboard, too far too fast, throwing caution to the winds, reckless. Many of us will recognize this state of mind from when we were new players – we know what it's like to be so excited that you are “thinking below the waist.” You can help by putting her in touch with some of the resources we have listed in the back of this book – good how-to literature that will help her make informed decisions, or the support groups on the Internet or in real life where she can talk to kindred spirits and get a “reality check.”

If you find yourself wondering about these issues, we counsel caution. Don't rush to judgment, and avoid forceful intervention – you could wind up alienating your friend, and driving him further away from any support you would like to offer. Let your friend or relative know that you care about him, that you're there if he wants to talk, and that if he ever finds himself in trouble you will do your best to help. If he's healthy and happy and playing just the way he wants to, he'll probably roll his eyes and chuckle – but he'll also be glad to hear that you care about him. And if he *is* in trouble, your message tells him that he's worthwhile, and that help is there if he needs it.

I know you know.

You're not stupid, and neither am I. I can see that it's changed your perception of me – and in some small way, has made me out to be some sort of freak. A weirdo, a pervert. Well I am. I long ago accepted those words as part of who and what I am, and I want you to accept them too.

Sexually, I am not like you. I like to be tied up during sex. I like to fantasize about rape and torture, of others and myself. But there is nothing wrong or unethical about fantasies, or actions between consenting adults. I'm not a serial killer waiting to happen, I haven't magically changed into some evil demon. I'm just me.

Our friendship must mean something to you, because you haven't condemned me outright. I can see it bothers you though, and I'd like to talk to you about it. Hopefully I can show you that what we do, we do in love and kindness. I'll understand if you don't want to talk about it. I am uncomfortable talking about my sexuality, so I can guess how it must feel to talk about someone else's. It makes me more uncomfortable knowing you might distrust me because of something that comes naturally to me. I hope this isn't something that we lose contact over.

N

Children of kinkyfolk. Just because Mom or Dad likes to play with handcuffs or high heels doesn't mean Junior is going to grow up to be the same way (although he may, of course, feel less ashamed of whatever sexual desires he might develop). Your authors' experience with our own grown children shows us that, if anything, they tend to be a little *less* interested in kinky sexuality than their peers – after all, what's the fun in doing something that

your parents do? Ick!

If your friend or relative has children, you may find that her ideas about what sexual information to share with them may not correspond to yours. These kids might know a great deal about their parents' sexuality, or their parents might have chosen to keep such matters private. (Please don't mention their parents' sexuality to them unless you're absolutely sure they're already aware of it.) If the kids have been given more information than you're used to seeing kids have, you may feel shocked or even worried.

Please don't be. There's no "right" amount of sexual information for children to have, as long as they have enough to help them make their own intelligent sexual decisions later on. You'll see that kids who are well-informed about sexual matters are no different than you were – they're still kids, growing up, building their own worlds and developing their own ambitions and opinions.

If your kinky friend or relative is basically a good parent – providing love, nurturance, physical care, a stable environment, structure, and the other things kids need to grow up happy and healthy – please don't try to "rescue" those kids. They don't need it; they're fine just the way they are.

Your own boundaries. Back to you. You get to have respect for your own boundaries. You can get as close to your friend or relative as you want to, and no closer. That will work best in the long run: remember that good fences make good neighbors.

There is a wonderful organization, P-FLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) who offer support groups to the family members of sexual minorities. They do great work, and have recently opened up an arm devoted to understanding transgendered people. We are hoping that by the time you read this book, P-FLAG may include some groups for the friends and families of kinky people.

We hope that the support of this book, organizations like P-FLAG, and the love and affection of your kinky friend and relative will enable you to choose to learn more about your friend's wonderful adventures.

Dear Loved Ones:

For years i wondered what was missing. For years I craved to be controlled, to yield my will, to be turned on by someone when they chose to, to give up my power willingly to a wonderful partner. I just didn't know what to call it. I wanted to give expression to this feistiness within me, in the context of a sexual encounter, but still surrender in the end to pain and then to pleasure.

The love and support you gave me over the years left me wanting, even craving, the situations I now find: I am dominated emotionally, physically, and sexually. I get high in a way no drug can make me high, and feel love that I never imagined before.

I have dreams that leave me anticipating the next encounter, and when the phone rings my heart races wildly. He calls and tells me I am a good girl. He grabs me roughly and loves me tenderly. He carries me on a wake of pain then a surf of pleasure and I know that I belong. My identity is not in what I do or who I know or how much money I have. My identity rests in serving and pleasing and playing at these activities you would cringe at and frown upon.

But I am complete, and I know that's what you've wanted for me all along.

"d"

9

A Special Chapter for Helping Professionals

This chapter is dedicated to the doctors, nurses, therapists and other helping professionals who have taken care of us when we were sick, and been gracious and supportive about our bruises, welts, tattoos, piercings and so on. Hearts of gold, nerves of steel.

In this chapter, we will review the issues that come up for health professionals in treating kinky patients. We think we can offer you some useful ideas about how to care for kinky people, and at the same time make going to the doctor, or looking for a therapist, a safer occupation for practitioners of S/M and other kink.

For the medical professional. If you are a doctor, nurse practitioner, physician's assistant, chiropractor or other medical professional, you are certainly used to seeing naked bodies, and have probably long since lost any sense of modesty or embarrassment that nudity may once have caused you. But when kinky people take their clothes off, their private life ceases to be private, and you, the health professional, may be shocked, embarrassed or confused by evidence, in the form of bruises, welts, piercings, etc., of a very different lifestyle.

From where we sit, this is a dilemma. We do not want to embarrass you, frighten you or cause you any discomfort. We would never dream of requiring you to understand our most arcane sexual practices if we had, for instance, met you at a cocktail party.

But, when we are sick, we have to get examined, and then we are telling you about our sex lives without either your consent or our choosing. We are telling you about floggings, fistings, spankings, canings, cuttings, tattoos, piercings temporary and permanent. You might see little rows of bruises from clothespins, or other marks on the body that you might never figure out. We know this can be awkward for you, and we also know, from personal experience, that it is terrifically awkward for us.

Please remember that your kinky patients are probably both embarrassed and fearful. To show our marks to outsiders could be dangerous. Some of us have been hospitalized without our consent or separated from our children by well-meaning folk who think we are not safe when we are. More often we get treated as inferior, or perhaps a little crazy, or with that subtle prejudice that means that doctors and nurses will doubt us when we describe our symptoms, or assume that we are substance abusers or otherwise screwed up. Diagnosticians who think we're crazy may assume that the medical symptoms for which we are seeking treatment exist only in our (obviously confused) heads. The consequences for us can be unfriendly and potentially negligent medical care: we might have trouble getting a prescription for pain medication that another person would receive routinely. (Obviously, we don't feel pain like everybody else, right?)

What can you do? Treat the kinky person who comes into your office exactly the way you treat anyone else. Do your best to let your patient know you see her as a person, an individual, not a categorical pervert.

Know that surface-level bruising and welts is normal to S/M play: many people who enjoy the sensation of whips can't get the level of stimulation they like without some bruising or welts. Painful or intense stimuli that kinky people enjoy on purpose differ from the pain of injury by much more than just a state of mind. S/M players explore a specific set of sensations to get a specific pattern of intense sensation, carefully timed so the body can respond in a pleasurable way. It feels – and, we believe, is – very different from the frightening and uncontrolled pain that accompanies illness or injury.

This is a letter that I actually did write. The year was 1990; I was 19 years old, and I was taking an undergraduate psychology seminar. The topic of discussion that week was masochism in the Freudian sense, which inevitably led to chatter about masochism in the sexual sense.

My classmates offered the usual negative stereotypes of S/M, using words like "violence" and "rape," and speaking of the oppression of women. I wanted to speak up right then and tell them the truth about it, but I feared to. What would happen if they knew of me, and I didn't change their minds?

So I wrote out this letter, and asked the professor - an open-minded sort - if he would read it anonymously to the class at its next meeting. Here it is:

I am a member of this class who has chosen to resort to anonymity in responding to the remarks made last week about sexual sadomasochism. I would far prefer to have been able to address the topic directly, as I do not wish to perpetuate the notion that an inclination toward S/M is a source of shame - but people's wariness at its mention did not make me feel comfortable enough to speak out.

I would like to give voice to the oft-unspoken perspective of the women and men who choose to participate in sexual S/M. Within the S/M community, as in most groups, there is a diversity of perspectives, but I think that I can make some generalizations that are representative of the whole.

When I use the term sadomasochism, I am referring to a consensual sexual activity. The specifics of this activity vary widely, but among those who practice it seriously and responsibly there are three key elements: consent, communication and trust.

One stereotype of S/M is that of a callous aggressor violating a helpless, unwilling victim. In actuality, the person in the "bottom" role has as much input and control over what happens as the "top" participant does. Verbal communication is an extremely important part of determining consent and enjoyment, and either participant may bring about a decrease in intensity or a complete halt of the activity with a pre-arranged word. In this context, S/M can be an emotionally empowering and bonding experience for both partners, characterized by caring, giving and sensuality. If consent is absent, then the act in question is not one of sex but of violence, abuse or rape.

Having experienced both physical abuse on one hand and S/M on the other, I can attest to the extreme difference in emotional content between the two. On the surface the acts may seem similar to one who is not familiar with sexual S/M - pain is inflicted, and instruments like whips and bondage equipment may be involved. For one who enjoys the sensation of pain in sexual situations, however, the contexts of S/M and physical abuse are worlds apart.

I'd like to respond briefly to the stereotype of the male participant as "top" and the female as "bottom." From my personal experiences, from conversations with others, and from reading literature and erotica written by sadomasochists, I know that there are many women who enjoy the dominant role, and many men who enjoy the submissive role. I am a woman who enjoys both the top and bottom roles, and who has participated in both roles with men and with other women.

For people who are into S/M, it can be difficult to find each other and realize that we are not alone in these desires. The taboo nature of the topic isolates us, but speaking out helps us to alleviate this isolation and to counteract negative stereotypes. I wish that I could simply have raised these points in class, instead of resorting to anonymity, but I don't know you people very well, and I am afraid of being verbally abused or physically attacked for making these statements. That is a context of pain that I would most assuredly not enjoy.

I cannot explain why it is that a subset of the population finds the sensation of pain to be sexually arousing, any more than I can explain why people are gay or bi or straight. But it is much easier to accept and enjoy it than it is to attempt to deny or repress the feelings. Sadomasochism, practiced responsibly, is a viable sexual activity - not something to be ashamed of or apologized for.

I thank the professor for the opportunity to present these points.

-Anonymous-

As the professor read the letter aloud, my classmates listened with respect, in thoughtful silence. When the topic came up again, in discussions and class papers later on in the semester, they were careful to make clear the distinction between sexual S/M and non-consensual violence. It was heartwarming to witness this example of people's willingness to open their minds, to accept and to speak a new truth.

I got an A in the class, and some years later that professor wrote one of my graduate school recommendations. I am now studying to become a psychologist, and I look forward to adding my name to the "Kink Aware Professionals List" someday!

If you are looking at bruised or cut skin, take a deep breath and disengage any initial emotional reaction you might be feeling. You may not understand your patient's pleasure, but you do have the medical knowledge to determine if this person's practice was safe. S/M "marks" should be surface level and designed to heal easily without complications. So ask yourself: are bruises and welts on well-padded body parts, where they will easily heal? Are there

underlying organs that could be endangered? It is commonly accepted among players that buttocks and thighs, shoulder and chest muscles, are safe parts of the body, well-padded with muscle and fat, with skeletal protection for the organs underneath.

Dossie gets her annual pap smear around the time of her birthday, which helps her remember, but if she can't get an appointment until after her happy birthday spanking... (One doctor inquired if she had been riding horses. She answered, "No.") Another asked directly about the bruises, and seemed accepting when she told him it was her birthday. This was all much easier in the good old days of medicine when you could choose your doctor and go back to the same one every year. Modern medicine requires that we expose ourselves to so many people!

A friend of ours tells about the time she forgot to remove her labia ring. A nurse-practitioner dealt with her surprise very nicely by exclaiming, "Oh, what a cute little ring!" Our friend apologized for not forewarning her, and reassured her that the piercing was healed and that nothing about the exam would hurt it.

Most of the injuries involved in S/M play are comparable to those that may happen during sports like touch football or hobbies like woodworking – shallow cuts and bruises, sore or strained muscles.

Again, your knowledge of anatomy can inform you about what is safe, what will heal readily, and what might be ill-advised.

If you have a question about the safety of any marks you see on a person or any practices your patient may describe, ask the patient what safety precautions they have taken. Unless you, the medical professional, have made an in-depth study of this subject, your patient may know more about it than you do, and might be able to explain how it is safe. If you still don't think it's safe, than you can discuss it with your patient like two responsible adults.

What you can do to be supportive.

- Let your patient know that you accept and respect her.
- We are physiologically no different from you, and you could probably learn to enjoy the same things we do if you wanted to, and it's fine if you don't.
- Nonjudgmental questions are not a problem.
- Prescribe all medications, particularly for pain, as you would with anyone else. We do not enjoy pain from illness or injury any more than you do.
- For further information, we recommend you read "Health Care Without Shame" by Dr. Charles Moser, listed in the Resource Guide.
- If you are still perplexed by something you do not understand, and your patient can't explain it to you to your satisfaction, you can always seek consultation. In our Resource Guide you will find the information to access Kink-Aware Professionals, a list of doctors and therapists who are knowledgeable about kink, in every state and some foreign countries.
- It is not a crime to not know how something works. If you have no experience of S/M or kink, then you have little or no idea of how it works. As long as you understand that, and seek more information when you are confused, you will do just fine at treating your kinky patients with care and respect.
- Remember that you do not know how many people you see who have kinky sex lives. You can only identify those few who have visible marks on their bodies at the time you examine them, or who talk to you about their alternative sexual practices. Most of your patients try very hard to conceal their kinkiness from you. We worry about this: we've heard from too many kinkyfolk who are reluctant to seek medical care when they need it for fear of discovery and judgment.

- If you want to do a small-scale statistical study of your own practice, compare the incidence and severity of injuries caused by S/M that you treat to the injuries suffered by those who ski. Then compare your feelings about them.

Psychological professionals. You may have clients, in your private practice or in community service work, who are practitioners of S/M or other kink. Kinky people seek therapy for the same reasons that anyone else would: anxiety, depression, conflict in a relationship, recovery from chemical dependency, healing from childhood abuse, etc. Your kinky client's needs may have little or nothing to do with his sexual practices, or they might, or perhaps your client wants to feel safe talking to you about all aspects of his life.

Since Krafft-Ebing, many psychological theorists have assumed that kink is universally caused by underlying psychopathology. All forms of sexual variation have been defined as sick, and it is only recently that we have begun to accept gay, lesbian and bisexual people as sane.

The most recent edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, usually known as the DSM-IV, has changed the criteria for diagnosing paraphilias, including fetishism, transvestism and sadomasochism, to indicate that sexual behaviors involving consenting adults are only to be considered pathological if: "The behavior, sexual urges, or fantasies cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational or other forms of functioning." "...A Paraphilia must be distinguished from the nonpathological use of sexual fantasies, behaviors or objects as a stimulus for sexual excitement in individuals without a Paraphilia."¹

The alternative sexual behaviors we describe in this book are now comparable to oral sex thirty years ago, when it was included in many legal definitions as "sodomy" (which is still true in some

states), and believed to be degrading and disrespectful. Today, sexual variation is actively coming out of the closet. The changes in the DSM-IV definitions were made after extensive lobbying from the various kink communities.

Tolerance is not the same thing as understanding. Safe, sane and consensual kink is not, and should not be, self- or other-destructive. Sexual abuse does happen, and is pathological, whether the participants are wearing leather and chains or cotton and sweats. The abuse part lies in the mistreatment of one person by another, and, sadly, happens in all forms of relationships from the far out to the conventionally married. Thoughtful practitioners of kink are not responsible for all the bad sex in the world.

Dossie once had a young woman come to her who had questions about S/M practices she had been introduced to. She told Dossie that her top had put her in a bathtub with a six-volt car battery. Dossie says, “I bit my tongue. Being an experienced player myself, I strongly felt that this was not okay. But I didn’t want to shake my finger at her and make her feel bad. So I asked her if she felt that this was safe. She responded that she didn’t, and that’s why she was seeking therapy because she knew that she was doing things that weren’t healthy for her. I think if I had lectured her instead of asking for her opinion, she would not have felt safe enough with me to work on her issues.”

What is hard for outsiders to understand is that kinky people have figured out ways to enact fantasies, stimulations and psychodramas safely within the boundaries of scene space. So while what they do might look dangerous – indeed, they might go to some lengths to make their play appear dangerous – they work hard all the while to keep things safe both physically and emotionally... sort of like sexual stuntpersons.

Theories and reductionism. Kinkyfolk do enact archetypes,

myths, and all kinds of stories. Psychoanalytical theorists often try to analyze these stories to tease out an underlying psychodynamic. This is fine when you are endeavoring to understand the individual, but it can be a real problem if you are predisposed to find pathology, or resistant to the possibility of health.

Even when you have a good idea about the dynamic of one person's story, you can't generalize. All people who are eroticized to shoes, for instance, are not the same. They couldn't be; there are too many of them. Beware generalizing and reductionism. Freud, for instance, tried to reduce our entire sexual heritage to the single story of Oedipus, with a brief bow offstage to Electra.

Dossie recently attended a lecture by a current psychoanalyst offering his theory that all people (he actually spoke only of men – well, one man) who like beating and bondage had martyr mothers. Of course, almost all of us of a certain age did have martyr mothers – they constituted the only approved variety in the pre-feminist era of Donna Reed and June Cleaver. Thus one-case reasoning reduces to a one-story theory.

We believe that if studies were made of a representative cross-section of kinky people, lots of psychological health would be discovered, and many, many stories. There are as many stories as there are people, and more still if you count that many of us explore more than one story.

When you are trying to understand someone, you would do better to listen for her story rather than to try to fit what you are hearing into some other prefabricated story. Let us not allow therapy to become a Procrustean bed in which we tear people apart, discarding something here, stretching there, to make sure they fit our theories. Kinky people have only one thing in common, their love of kinkiness. Otherwise we are a totally diverse group of people, just like everybody else. Beware of generalizations: they so

easily become oppressive.

Are kinkyfolk all abuse survivors? Some of us are, some are not. Your authors are one of each. Does it matter? The real question is, are we thriving? – and if we are not, is it our sexual practices that hinder us? Or are we struggling with the same obstacles of nature and nurture, programming and belief systems, that everybody else comes to therapy to work on?

Some people believe that those of us who enact fantasies of abuse, kidnap, infantilism, helplessness or infinite power are perpetuating a negative psychodynamic, helplessly repeating the abuse of our childhood, unable to escape. This may be true for some people, both kinky and vanilla. But for many of us kinky folk, reliving a story that embodies a profound conflict allows us to work it through, to heal and empower ourselves. An old tape can be changed and cleansed with eroticizing. When we enact a roleplay, we engage in a form of psycho-drama, and we get to choose the ending. We get an opportunity to enter into a painful memory and come out of it in a new and positive way, with sexual pleasure, with support, with love.

While erotic play may be therapeutic, it is emphatically *not* a substitute for therapy. When deep emotional issues open up in kinky play, we strongly recommend taking those issues to a kink-positive therapist and using that opening as an opportunity for increased self-understanding and, ultimately, healing. Sometimes we are doing in S/M and kink is a journey through our own Jungian shadow, experiencing, in a safe and contained environment, some of the forbidden parts of ourselves. And why should sexual play not be a place to bring our shadow selves into consciousness in a positive and life-affirming relationship? As an old friend of ours used to say, “I know my fantasies have dirty roots.” And how else shall we grow roses?

What should the therapist do? There is no reason why a therapist who knows little about alternative sexualities cannot do good work with a kinky person. Although some individuals' issues require an in-depth understanding of their sexual lifestyle, it is really only occasionally necessary or advisable to refer a client to a therapist with special training in kink. If your client, for instance, is exploring his psyche through a master/slave or a daddy/boy relationship, you might need some experience with what normally goes on in such relationships to understand what your client is telling you. Most often, however, the challenge will be similar to working with a client whose ethnic background or life history is different from your own. Most of what your kinky client needs you will be able to understand, and occasionally you will misunderstand. That is not the end of the world, as long as you are willing to acknowledge any confusion. We have both had excellent therapists who were not themselves players. The open-mindedness that any good therapist should have can carry you through.

Be willing to educate yourself, and to learn from your client. Take care of yourself. If you feel your own buttons getting pushed, work that through, get some support, get a consultation from another professional on the Kink-Aware Professionals list. Read some of the books written by people who have been playing with kink for many years. Avoid judgments and pathologizing. Treat your client with respect. Listen. Listen. Listen.

A final thought: Experienced erotic roleplayers develop a lot of skills at journeying in the shadowy parts of their psyches. As you might predict, this is so much like therapy that many of us take to therapy like ducks to water. We could become some of your most rewarding clients.

1. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition, the American Psychiatric Association, Washington, D.C., 1994, pps. 523 & 525. We do not support sexual behaviors engaged in without the full and knowing consent of competent adults.*

What If It's Your Partner?

If you are uncomfortable with variant forms of sexual expression, and your partner tells you that she has been exploring or wants to explore an alternative sexuality, you may find yourself in a difficult and painful position.

Your problem is not that your partner has gone crazy: kink is a sane and ethical life choice. Your problem is that you and your partner have a difference. Once we all understand that kink is neither mysterious, destructive, immoral or crazy, then we can see that this might simply be a difference – a very important difference.

Suppose one of you wants a child and the other doesn't. Suppose your lover decides to devote himself to a demanding spiritual practice. Suppose your wife gets a fabulous professional advancement – in a different state. Imagine any difference where one partner's choices have a profound effect on the other. That's the kind of problem you have, a serious difference with a large potential impact on your relationship. Why should it being about sex make it more difficult than these other differences?

There is hope. Other families, and other couples, have dealt with

such issues successfully, and the struggle to maintain their intimacy in the face of profound difference has often brought them even closer together than they were before, reinforced in mutual love and respect. The caring that you and your partner share can fuel the strength you need to struggle toward mutual understanding, even when it's painfully hard, and to accept change in your relationship with mutual tolerance.

We suggest you start dealing with this amazing news by taking very good care of yourself. Deal with the shock first. You may find all kinds of difficult feelings welling up in you: betrayal, fear, shame, horror, insecurity, rage – this is a revelation that hits very close to home.

Start by giving yourself time to process the feelings you are having. Most people find that how they feel at the first shock is quite different from how they will feel in three days or so, so allow yourself enough time to let this news sink in. Your partner may be impatient for your approval or acceptance, with good reason, but your partner may have to wait until you get more familiar with your own response. We strongly advocate that you do not rush to judgment. Both of you may be tempted – it's not easy to let something this important rest in limbo while you sort out how you feel about it – but please don't leap to a hasty solution just so you can get this acutely uncomfortable issue off the table.

When your partner lets you know of his interest or experience with kink, a second issue looms very large on the horizon. Unlike a friend or other family member, you, as the life-partner, spouse, lover of your kinky person, cannot fully separate yourself from her kink. The issue of your own participation suddenly becomes very important, because if your partner is doing a kind of sex in which you do not choose to join, your sex life together is likely to get wobbly no matter what else you do.

We are keenly aware that there may be heartbreak on the table. Whether you just fell in love last week or you have a twenty-year marriage with a house and three kids, we know you have made a profound emotional investment in your relationship, and the prospect of separating over a sexual difference is an overwhelming loss. You have our sympathy, and our assurance that we will share with you everything we know that can make your relationship work.

Dear Wife, Family, Friends:

Only one of you, my wife, knows about my deepest secret, and she knows very little about it. I wish she knew all; I wish you all knew. I wish I could trust you to still feel the same way about me if you knew. But since I spent years thinking I was sick or perverted, I can hardly expect you to think otherwise.

Simply: since I was a small boy, I have found the idea of being spanked the most arousing sexual fantasy I know. I felt this way by age five; I felt this way during my teenage years and my adult years. All those years I wondered why, as you must wonder, but there is no reason. I feel that way just as I love chocolate and hate brussels sprouts, and nothing is going to change it.

My wife knows this, and a little more: she knows I have written about this subject for on-line newsgroups, and she knows I have a collection of spanking erotica which I keep hidden. She even knows that I paid, once, to be spanked by a woman who does such things professionally; not a prostitute, just a "dom" who performs such services for men like me... and there are far more of us than you imagine.

What my wife does not know, because I did not feel she wanted to know, is that I have been spanked dozens of times, and I have spanked women, and sometimes there has been a certain amount of sexual play involved as well. Sometimes I have paid for this, and sometimes it has been a healthy form of play with people I have come to know from sharing thoughts and obsessions by e-mail.

This is what I want her, and all of you to understand: it may not be "normal" for you, but it is for me. None of this has anything to do with my deep love and affection for my wife. She finds the idea repellent, so I don't ask her to spank me or to be spanked by me. I would never ask her to do something sexual against her will, much as I would enjoy sharing this odd pleasure with her. But it's not a pleasure most people can share.

On the other hand, I denied myself these pleasures most of my life, just as I denied myself many sexual pleasures when I was young, believing, in that time long ago, that sex was for marriage, and nice girls didn't want to have sex, and all the absurd myths which were common then. I never used four letter words around women. I never tried to persuade the few women whom I was intimate with to engage in oral sex. I thought that the common beliefs about such matters were true. Now I know that common attitude towards people with my inclination is just such a myth. Nonsense, actually. We are normal. We are healthy. We are "wired" to enjoy a particular variation, and that's just the way we are.

So why do I want you to know? I have managed to keep this part of my life a secret from all of you, rather successfully, and I am sure you would rather think of me as I appear to you all than think of me in terms of an unusual sexual behavior. Why trouble you with what would be a troubling revelation?

Because if you could know me as I really am, maybe it would make you more accepting and understanding of everyone. Not that you aren't good, kind people, but tolerance and kindness are not the same thing as acceptance of behaviors like mine. When I was able to see myself as different, rather than as perverted, it became easier for me to accept and even appreciate how other people who look or act different in ways that I find hard to understand may be... almost certainly are... just as normal as I.

I'm not speaking of "sadists" who hurt unwilling victims for their own pleasure. I am not that way, and the people whom I have spanked, or been spanked by, are not that way. We do what we do because of mutual enjoyment. The pain is like the pain of running a marathon, or doing bench presses. It is hardly pain at all; it is a pure sensory experience, just as pictures, or music, or some foods can be intense sensory experiences. There is a rush of intense sensation, concentrated in the buttocks (which are an erotic zone, of course) which feels - like nothing else in the world.

It's embarrassing. There is no sexual behavior which seems as silly as an adult being spanked. It's grotesque and humiliating. So, too, must the stories and pictures which people like me enjoy and are aroused by. We never fail to be aroused by words like "bare bottom" and "over the knee," or pictures of these activities. We want to turn these thoughts into reality; we want to have our bottoms truly bared, and to be spanked, or to spank someone. We think of naked bottoms turning red. We adore thoughts of the heat generated in the flesh of the behind. We dream of having to lie over someone's lap. It is childish and absurd.

But everyone was a child once, and everyone carries that child inside for an entire lifetime. Maybe that is the reason this is such a powerful image, and a powerful experience. Maybe it puts me, and others like me, in touch with some childhood experiences never resolved or, more likely, childhood pleasures denied. Who knows? I don't. But it's who I am.

So I wish you could just say, and believe, that it is no more important than what kind of car I prefer to drive, or how I dress, or what I like to eat. Because it is very much the same thing. It is a preference, one I cannot change if I wished to. And it hurts no one at all. It is, fundamentally, a game I enjoy playing with others who enjoy the same game. It involves none of you, since it is not a game you enjoy.

So... why can't I go out and play with the other children? Why does it matter to you what games I play, as long as I hurt no one and do not get hurt myself? I promise to be back when you want me, and I won't be any different. Except... I might have trouble sitting comfortably, now and then.

H

Remind yourself of what you value in this relationship already; it will help you summon the courage to hang in there long enough to make a thoughtful and informed decision. Remind yourself that your partner chose to love you, and to enter into a committed relationship with you, so your partner sees you as a very special person even if you're not comfortable swinging a whip.

Your partner has not changed. What has changed is simply his vision of his, and your, ideal sexual future. That may be a big difference, but whatever it is you love about your partner is still true, and it is still true that your partner chose to love you.

Remember what you have read so far about how the realities of sexual variance may be very different from the stereotypes and myths you have heard. You need to get up to speed with accurate information, and learn some of the language your partner is using, so that you are both speaking about the same things in more or less the same language and you have a way to understand each other. Reading this book is a great start – you’re a real adventurer!

Once you get past the myths and stereotypes, you may discover that the reality of what your partner actually wants to do is quite different from your mental picture of perversion. The reality of kink is usually a lot less scary than your worst nightmare. It might even seem safe and, possibly, even approachable.

How will this knowledge change your relationship? Maybe less has changed than you think. If your partner, for instance, has been engaging the services of professionals to provide sexual experience he was afraid to ask you about, then perhaps he is confiding in you because he has more trust in you. Even if he has been “deceiving” you for some time, during this same time you have built the good things that you value in your relationship. Many people feel that a revelation like this makes their whole relationship a sham, but this is not true. What is true is that your partner has made sacrifices in order to stay with you, presumably because he wants you in his life.

Being full of care. That’s what “careful” means – caring about each other, letting your care for one another guide you through this difficult time. Empathy is your strongest asset. You may be feeling just terrible right now – unsafe, threatened, insecure, angry – and your partner probably knows this. Your partner is probably also

fearful – of your rejection, your disapproval, your disgust. So do your best to be accepting of each other and respect each others' feelings.

This is not about somebody being right and somebody else being wrong, no matter how tempting it may be to blame. You are both dealing with this difficult stuff because you both want this relationship to succeed: you are both on the same side.

Your options. As we mentioned earlier, being the partner of a kinky person means that you have one less option than everyone else she knows: you don't get to forget about the whole thing. This is your partner, your spouse, your mate, and pretending you never heard what she told you about her sexuality will not work.

So what are your options? You have quite a few.

Asking your partner to give up kink. What if alternative sexual behaviors are totally not okay with you? Can you ask your partner to just stop? In our experience, very few people succeed in denying their desires once they have discovered a safe way to make those dreams come true. For us, it would be like asking us to cut off our arm, to leave behind what we find to be a very valuable part of ourselves. We would feel incomplete and amputated if we were asked never to have our favorite kinds of sex. To ask someone to bury her sexual self is akin to demanding that she give up her integrity and become somebody else.

Furthermore, if you insist that she stop exploring her sexuality in a kinky direction, you run the risk of driving her underground. Then you get to deal with a secret life.

You may find yourself wondering whether his offer to rub your feet after a long day, or her slightly abrupt request that you take out the garbage, represents some sort of hidden sexual agenda. Will you ever be comfortable? Will you ever feel safe? Will you wonder

about every hangup phone call, every unexplained absence? Will you read her journal? Will she leave?

Opening up your relationship. Perhaps you can live with the idea of your partner exploring kink, but you're just not very interested in doing so yourself. You can still maintain your relationship, if you choose, by coming to terms with your partner taking care of her kinky needs somewhere else.

So where is "somewhere else?" Many committed partners have outside lovers, and this is particularly common among those of us who have uncommon sexual tastes. Kinky people are pretty used to the idea that the person who wants to do exactly what we want to do in sex may be a very different person from the partner with whom we want to share a home, three children and a mortgage. So it makes good sense that many couples have agreed to accept "play partners" into the ecology of their relationship. Others find that it suits their sense of limits better if the kinky partner plays only at play parties, or only with professional dominants.

This does bring up the equally difficult, but not insurmountable, issue of nonmonogamy. Whether your partner will play with a lover, sexual friends or a professional, you will have to work through any jealousy or insecurity you may feel.

We can't tell you in complete detail here about how to negotiate some sexual openness in your relationship (if you're interested, our book "The Ethical Slut: A Guide to Infinite Sexual Possibilities" will give you much more information), but let us warn you about some of the traps.

We often hear of folks who tell their spouses or partners, "Go ahead and play with other people if you have to, but I don't want to hear about it." In our experience, this is rarely a good idea. Most people find it easier to get comfortable when they know about what is going on, can ask questions, maybe even meet these outside

partners.

When a couple tries to deal in secrecy there are too many blanks. Nature abhors a vacuum, and we have a natural human tendency to fill in the blanks. When there is something we don't know that is important to us, we don't tolerate not knowing very well, so we tend to imagine what might be in the blank space. And what we most commonly imagine in this kind of blank space is our worst fear. Remember the last time your partner was late and didn't call? Did you call the Highway Patrol, imagining a terrible accident? Most of us have. We fill in the blank with our worst fear.

So if you want to know what it is that you are most afraid of, make a deal to keep secrets from each other. It is almost a certainty that you will torture yourself with your own worst fears. You are, for instance, very likely to convince yourself that this mysterious person in your partner's life is younger, thinner, smarter, sexier... you can fill in your own fear of your own inadequacy. We doubt if this will make you happy.

When we know the truth about what is going on, we get the information we need to reassure ourselves about our own importance in the scheme of things. We know of initially horrified partners who now think nothing of buying their spouse a session with a professional dominant for a birthday present, or throwing a birthday party for their lover's lover.

Some people think you can differentiate between sex and kink, and negotiate an agreement that it's okay to do kink outside the relationship, but not sex. This may look reasonable from the outset, but how do you define sex? Does it mean having an orgasm? Genital contact? Arousal? We already know the answer – there is no precise definition of what constitutes sex, and any line you might try to draw will turn out to have so much gray area that it will be more of a fog than a line. Truth is, kink is a form of intimacy, and arousal

and fulfillment can take many forms. You can't make a rule that will protect you from feeling jealous or insecure.

I want you to know why I'm angry with you.

No I'm not normally an angry person (as you know) and I'm not vengeful, not hurtful, and I have unlimited patience...but I AM angry with you.

I want to tell you that my sexual feelings have always been the most important feelings in my life. I don't know whether they are the only thing that I've ever been excited about in my life, but sometimes it sure feels that way. There are times these days when I feel that my life has turned into a set of responsibilities that I must fulfill in my role of "good guy," and that my life is completely devoid of things to get excited about. I really feel this way.

Of course it is pointless for us to talk about these things. The last several times you asked about my sexual feelings we wound up in hopeless arguments where you couldn't handle how depressed I was, and how hopeless I felt, and how powerless you felt because you didn't have any magic motivational speeches that would make it "all better."

But that's not really why I'm angry.

What angers me is the knowledge that you are not powerless, that in a very real way you have chosen to put me in this state.

SM feelings are not peculiar, they are not perplexing, they are not mystical. They are just very very strong emotional needs that have manifested themselves in ways that may seem peculiar. After a decade of intense soul-searching, I conclude that SM feelings are just regular feelings that I had no way of communicating.

While I am very attracted to sexual fantasy, I am not attached to any particular kind of fantasy. I can be a "bottom," a "top," spanker, spankee, foot massager. Indeed I could even live a comfortable life of regular normal sex...but that sex would have to be very very hot, steamy, and intimate.

It is the word intimate that is the key here. I am convinced that in my ideal universe, the entire purpose of sex is to provide the opportunity for me to communicate those very very hidden emotions deep within me in a pathetic (but wonderfully human) statement of being. Hot steamy sex is: two people dropping all of the barriers and saying to each other "hey this is really me-what about it."

I am angry with you, because I am now convinced that you want those barriers. What you really want from our sex-life is to keep to yourself, and have me remind you that I'm here, and I will protect you.

The perfect incarnation of our sexual dichotomy is our relationship to your body. Yes, your body, that thing that you feel so ashamed of, and are so humiliated about. Once upon a time, I adored your body. I lived for its touch. I dreamed about it constantly. I loved your short size, your wide hips, and your goofy torso. I

wanted your body to be the perfect image of my sexual fulfilment. Yet, for you, that same body was a worthless flesh unworthy of any adoration. My touches were met with cold apologetic giggles. My strokes fueled your cries of feminine inadequacy (which you blame the media for, but really it's you who brings it to life). I never created the media. I never bought into it. I loved your body...you couldn't understand that...you never will.

Of course this is a totally normal thing. Married people are not really supposed to have a sex life... no?

Maybe it's normal, but it's not the destination that I wanted so badly all those years ago. And I'm still angry about it.

T

But you *can* make agreements about certain forms of sexual or kinky behavior: some couples choose, for example, to keep penetrative intercourse as something they do only with one another; others make agreements about what kinds of behaviors are and are not okay outside their relationship. Most have some understanding about how they will protect themselves – and, by extension, their partners – from disease. The key to making such agreements work is

to be very, very clear about the actual meanings of the words you use, and to remain flexible so your agreements can change as your needs and comfort levels evolve.

Professional dominants provide, for many people, a relationship-neutral place for a kinky person to live out their fantasies with no threat to their non-kinky beloved. And when both of you are free from pressure about those kinky desires, the sex you do share may be most wondrously hot and steamy and satisfying.

Time is your best friend. You don't have to decide any of this today – you can explore the issue. There is no rush, and if you have a love relationship that is precious to you and you don't want to lose it, the best thing you can do is start moving very slowly.

We advocate getting all the info you can – read some more books. Consider joining a support group and attending a workshop: if you bravely go to places where you can meet some people and hear them talk about what they like to do, you will be under absolutely no obligation to participate. Keep that clear with yourself and your partner. It can really help to observe a variety of people who enjoy kink, and maybe even get a chance to talk to some of them. This is an opportunity for you to reality-test both your thoughts and your feelings.

Trying it yourself. What if your partner is revealing this to you because she wants you to participate? You get to think about this one for a long time. If you feel pressure to become an outrageous fantasy kinky creature right this moment, check first to see who's pressuring you – is it your partner or is it yourself?

If it's your partner, insist on having the time to think about all this. You are not going to succeed in building an expanded sex life by grudgingly giving in to bullying or emotional blackmail. If the pressure comes from you, get some support, slow down, and give yourself the time to deal with all this carefully.

There is an axiom in sex therapy that covers any situation where a person might feel pressure to perform sexually in a way that doesn't fit for them. The axiom tells us that if you are not allowed to say no, then you can never really say yes. If you should make the brave decision to try an alternative sexual behavior with your partner, remember that you both have a line-item veto, and that the best way to proceed is one step at a time.

If you decide to try it yourself you deserve understanding and support, for agreeing to take some risks, and for the wonderful trust you are giving your partner. You should have the opportunity to learn at your own pace and never be pushed to go further than you feel comfortable with. There is no hierarchy of kink where the kinkier you are, the better you are. What's important is the pleasure and the sexual expansion you are enjoying right now. Take the time to savor the pleasures of today before you leap on to what you would like to be doing tomorrow.

A good way to get started would be to turn back to Chapter 6, and try the Yes/No/Maybe exercise we described there with your partner. This can be a good jumping-off point to help you discover some activities that sound safe and rewarding to both of you.

Sex therapists declare that you can't tell if you like something if you just try it once. Chances are, the first time you attempt any new sexual activity, kinky or non-kinky, you will be so distracted by embarrassment and performance anxiety that you will be doing well to simply have gotten through your agenda. At the very least, you will most likely learn that a blindfold or a little bondage won't kill you, so be proud of yourself for being willing to try. To really find out if you like a particular form of sexual play takes at least three tries.

My dear B.,

I believed at one time we were beginning to fall in love, and I wished I'd been able to tell you about myself and my oddities, instead of always half hiding from you - and then telling you we must stop seeing each other. Let me belatedly try to explain what I was hiding from you - B. dear

You're a nurse, and know that youngsters can be imprinted for life with overwhelming urges - to fear heights, to make music, to climb mountains... or to crave genital excitement. My first memories of the urge are around age three, and by ten I was regularly and often covering the shiny wooden handle of a screwdriver with grease and sliding it into my bottom. I would leave it in for half an hour at a time, delighting in the sensation it gave, and from time to time sliding the handle out and in again. There... I've told you the worst in one short paragraph. If you are still reading, I can promise you there is nothing more shocking to come. B., do keep reading so I can tell you the whole story!

When I was sixteen, my family moved north and I went to a Scottish public school as a day-boy. The Calvinistic culture of that cold climate forced me to hide my obsessive urges from everyone around me. I became very unhappy, so unhappy that I eventually asked one of the schoolmasters: "What's wrong with homosexuality?" He gently drew out the cause of my question... and informed the principal! Father was abroad, and the principal called my mother in for an interview and angrily (she said) asked her how long she had known about my homosexuality - which was complete news and a considerable shock to her! I was allowed to stay in the school ("because you came and asked for help"), on condition that I saw a psychiatrist, who lectured me on "Duty." I was angry about my obsession with the bottoms of other boys, and with my urges to insert smooth round things into my own. I was convinced that if I could understand why I had these different urges, then they would disappear and I would become like everyone else and no longer be plagued by these cravings that separated me from other people.

The feeling I had then after leaving my English public school, of being separated from others by a barrier, continued through my years in the air force and on into my days at a prestigious Cambridge college. I knew no one closely enough to confide in them my anal-erotic obsessions. Inside my chattering exterior, I was lonely and unhappy. I remember writing an essay to remind myself: If you take your life, you will certainly never be able to find the solution to your problems: So don't do it! Back in my rooms in Cambridge shortly after, however, a student knocked and walked in and said: "I have a friend who tells me I should introduce you to some kindred spirits in Cambridge."

The result felt like a magnificent fireworks display, where rockets shoot upwards and burst in dazzling showers of stars. I was suddenly in congenial company that valued my little bit of wit,

where talk and practices matched my own urges. Some of these kindred spirits lived in my own college, and I would hear a quiet "tap, tap" on my door some nights about eleven o'clock. I felt like a seed responding to the sun after many years of winter. My first job had me living in a Midlands town, in lodgings with a dozen other bachelors. I now knew how to find congenial company in a new town, and soon made friends with exciting people.

This was the time, B., when you treated me in the eye hospital and we came to know each other. It was your beautiful directness and sincerity that first attracted me to you, coupled with your complete lack of worldly knowledge. I soon had to break things off between us though, B. dear: I could not bring myself to play on your affections further, and draw you into the copulatory excesses that I was enjoying at the time. I do hope you can forgive me, B.; I should never have tried to enter the affections of someone as lovely and unspoiled as yourself. I only hope this belated and sorry story helps you to feel less hurt by my sudden ending of our growing friendship. We happened to meet about six months afterward, do you remember? You were looking lovely as always, with a racquet and in tennis whites, and I told you of my impending move to Scotland. You kindly wished me well, and I left the following week. I was soon after most happily married. We now have a lovely family.

B., if you ever should (again) become involved with anyone who has this "kink," it would help and support him a great deal, and reinforce your relationship together, if you were able to enjoy not just vaginal sex with him, but also were able to revel in erotic (not "punishment"!) spankings and having sex with your lovely bottom. It depends how open you are to new ideas - many girls can only ever have vaginal sex, and in the "missionary" position at that: it's what their mothers told them was the "right" way. Others enjoy new ways of having sex with their lover as they help their relationship to stay fresh and exciting. A new way of having sex is a bit like starting to drink sherry: you often don't like it much at first, but it's a taste that you acquire until you really feel a meal is incomplete unless you can have a glass of Bristol Cream.

But if you could never bring yourself to enjoy varying vaginal sex, with spanking and sex with your lovely bottom, you would have had to accept that there were urgent parts of my life which you could not share... never quite knowing what those parts were. And I'm not sure you'd even have wanted to continue knowing me on that basis, would you, B.?

My story is one with secrets as dark as any Victorian melodrama - but it does have its comic sides and moments of wild exhilaration! One could be dealt a very much worse hand in life - don't think, of course, to pity me! But, B., I am so very sorry to have hurt you. I do hope you can now bring yourself to forgive me.

W.

Role-playing - pretending to be nurse nasty or the wicked count or the poor little victim - is one of the most common items in our fantasies, but it is often the most difficult to learn how to do. Your authors still feel quite proud of ourselves when we pull off a scene that includes playing parts with a lot of verbal interplay. It is an acquired ability to talk and stay aroused at the same time. Instead, each of you can run the fantasy in your mind - you could actually

have a wonderful time and each be running a different movie in your head. People do it all the time in non-kinky sex, so you probably already have that skill down.

The easiest place to start is with one new physical sensation, like a blindfold or a light spanking, or one new adventure, like a small exploration of cross-dressing. You learned a little bit about these activities earlier in this book, and you can get other books from the Resource Guide that will help you with technique and finesse.

With any stimulation, it works best to start very gently and then build up so slowly that the recipient will eager for you to go further faster. This works a lot better than whopping somebody across the behind as hard as you can before they are turned on. Going slowly gives you both time to get warmed up and turned on, and lets you explore each new experience as it happens without feeling driven to move on to the next step right away. If you slow down to a ritual, almost trancelike pace, you will be moving slow enough to make no mistakes, and your partner will probably love it.

Similarly, if you are on the receiving end of the stimulus, make a deal with your partner beforehand to move forward very slowly, so you have plenty of time to feel safe with a particular stimulation, and to decide how much of it you want.

Beginner's mind. Allow yourself to be a beginner. Buddhists instruct advanced meditation practitioners to constantly return to “beginner's mind” in order to see things freshly and clearly, without preconceptions. Your explorations as a beginner are wonderful and exciting and truly a great adventure – so enjoy them. It is a terrible waste to fail to notice the pleasure you are sharing today because you are preoccupied planning for greater pleasures tomorrow.

Try playing with a new toy or activity for a while and then finishing with the kind of sex you already know you both love. Do this a lot, and your relationship will thrive even if it takes years, as it

has for most of us, to get to where you are comfortable doing the scenes that lie in the far reaches of your fantasies. You can get comfortable: we know, we have, and you are under no obligation whatsoever to do the scariest stuff you can think of. Why would you want to? Stick with what feels safe today, and see what changes tomorrow.

What if you try it and you don't like it? Three easy tries, and you still don't like it? Well, you are no worse off than you were before, and now you have a lot more knowledge about what kinky sex is about. We have a myth in our culture that all sex which is less than perfectly and exquisitely transcendent is a total flop. This is not true. If you attempt any new sexual endeavor and it's barely okay or not really that great, that is all that will happen. You will not die of mortification, nor will the planet open up and swallow you whole. If you try something that doesn't work, you and your partner can have a rueful laugh about it, take care of each other for now, and decide what you want to do about all that later. One third-rate sexual encounter will not traumatize you for life.

What if you try it and you do like it? Welcome to a very crowded closet.

Conclusion: Kink Unburied

So now we have shared with you everything we can think of that might help you deal with the reality of having a kinky person close to you in your life. We have talked about health and sickness, safety and sanity, and hopefully given you a positive and realistic picture of your kinky friend's world. We have offered suggestions for family members, helping professionals, and partners of kinky people on dealing with the presence of a kinky person in your life, and we sincerely hope that some of them are useful to you.

As we talk about various aspects of kinkiness in the world, we are acutely aware that we are unburying a whole bunch of wild ideas, dark fantasies, baroque behaviors, and intense sexual sensation that our culture normally keeps hidden in the belief that just knowing – not advocating, not participating, not fantasizing, just knowing – about these practices will somehow harm or pollute you. As if you couldn't make an informed decision about your own sex life. As if this knowledge could send you spiraling down a path of depravity you never chose or intended. As if just talking about forbidden sexuality had some magical consequences beyond that talking.

Obviously, we don't believe any of this. You probably don't either. We suspect that you have read this book, with perhaps some trepidation, but in perfect safety, and that, having read it, you have not suddenly become somebody you weren't before. This is important to remember as you face the daunting challenge of continuing connection and communication with your kinky person – this is about words. Words and ideas. Thinking about it can't hurt you. And nothing about this means that you ought to change who you are. You are just fine right now.

As we see it, you, the nonkinky person in your kinky person's life, have some choices. You can choose to rebury all this information, with the sad understanding that this act will distance you from your friend or family member. Or you can choose to open a dialogue with your friend, ask questions about his reality, find ways to get safe with honesty between you. Or you can decide never to speak to your kinky person again, to slam the door of your affection in her face.

Obviously, we hope that you will choose to open a dialogue, to open your heart, and to find a way to empathize with your friend or loved one. We believe you will both be enriched by your connection, and that any differences between you, far from creating an impossible chasm, might become the subject of lively discourse and the sharing of heartfelt feelings that brings you closer. Your differences, you know, are an important contribution that you bring to this relationship – you enrich your friend's life when you share what is unique to you. We hope you find the way to love each other without necessarily agreeing about everything, without conditions.

Unconditional love is not some unattainable ideal, suitable only for saints and bodhisattvas. Unconditional love happens all the time, in often funky ways: it is a real force already present in our everyday lives. We do not cease to love our children when they

misbehave. We do not need to cease to love them when they grow up and make life decisions that weren't part of our plan. We love them while we have reservations, even when we disapprove. We grown-ups can afford to treat each other with that same generosity of spirit, simply by being mindful of how acutely we love each other, even when times are hard.

Unconditional love is not difficult; most often it is a simple truth. It means I love you even when I disagree. I love you when I think you're being a jerk. I love you when *I'm* being a jerk. I don't need to agree with or approve of every single thing about you to love you, and you don't need to be perfect to be loved. It is a finer love that recognizes our human frailties and continues to love. And the love we share with our families and lovers is not based on some objective evaluation of an individual's worthiness. Real love is based on our feelings of emotional connectedness, and that connection doesn't go away unless you cut it off.

Knowing that, perhaps you can find the courage to love your kinky friend even when you are shocked or frightened by her or his sexual choices. We have said this before, but it bears reiterating now: we feel quite sure that your kinky person cares about you. Otherwise, why would they take the risk of facing your disapproval or disgust by coming out to you? We kinky folk do not share our precious pleasures with most people. Most of us do not choose to spend our lives in fruitless argument with people we don't care about.

Somewhere in that mutual caring, we hope you find the wherewithal to hang in there with your friend until a growing understanding emerges, and you can continue to care about your friend with serenity.

Once again, we want to acknowledge that you, our readers, are the people who care enough to want to learn about their dear

friend's lifestyle, and we congratulate you for making the effort to understand. And we hope we have been able to offer some help in your journey.

Thank you.



Glossary

(Words printed in italics are separately defined in the Glossary.)

Abuse: How do kinkyfolk distinguish between *kink* and abuse? The most important difference is that the kinks we discuss in this book are all *consensual*. Kinkyfolk negotiate what they're going to do ahead of time; abusers don't. Another important difference is that playing with our kinks is something we do to enhance our own, and our partners', well-being; abusers don't care about their victims' well-being. Truth to tell, kink doesn't feel like abuse either.

Age Play: Play in which one or more people act the role of someone younger – or older – than they really are. Age players can be dependent infants, stubborn toddlers, explorative schoolchildren, mouthy teenagers or whatever other role interests them. Both *bottoms* and *tops* can play with age change.

Archetype: Here we get a little Jungian. In Jungian theory, an

archetype is a universal symbol which carries tremendous power, and appears in many forms throughout human culture. Examples of archetypes in the classical sense might be “nurturing mother,” “trickster,” “benevolent deity,” and so on. A lot of kinky play explores these archetypes, often in modern form – the whip-wielding leather-clad spike-heeled *dominatrix* (“bitch goddess”) is a good example. In trying to understand your kinky person better, it might help to think about what archetypes she is exploring.

BDSM: This is a fairly recent coinage that seems to have been formed on the Internet. It squishes together three older terms – B&D (*bondage* & discipline), *D/S* (dominance & submission), and *S/M* (sadomasochism).

Bestiality: Also sometimes called *zoophilia*. Some people enjoy sexual interactions with animals. It has been pointed out to us that, unless they are tied down or abused, animals are quite able to express nonconsent: they can bite, scratch, growl or just run away. On the other hand, some people believe that the animals in question are being exploited even if they are not being hurt. We have not been able to interview a representative sample of beasts to get their point of view. Informed consent is a tricky issue here.

Blindfold: A way to restrict or eliminate a bottom’s vision, which helps her to relax and focus. Players might use a blindfold made especially for that purpose, or a scarf or other piece of cloth. A safe blindfold does not put pressure on the eyeballs, but the blindfolded should remove his contacts anyway.

Body Modification: Changing the appearance of the body with

piercings, tattoos, *cuttings* and other physical methods. People who are into body modification may or may not also be into *S/M* or other *kinks*. Sometimes shortened to “bodymod.”

Body worship: Caressing, kissing or licking some part or parts of the dominant’s body.

Bondage and discipline: Many people use this as a term for “softer,” less intense SM. It usually includes some form of tying someone up, and may include milder *pain* activities such as light *spanking* or *clamps*.

Bondage: An umbrella term for using rope, leather and similar materials to restrain some aspects of one’s partner’s ability to move (or, sometimes, just for decoration). Bondage may be very mild – for example, a soft loop of rope holding the wrists together in front of the body – or very restrictive.

Bottom: An umbrella term for the one who gets “done to” – the *submissive*, the *masochist*, the *slave*, the *boy* or *girl*, whatever. Some people use “bottom” to mean only someone who enjoys receiving strong sensation, as opposed to “submissive” for someone who enjoys having his behavior controlled, but we’ll use the first definition in this book.

Boy or Girl: A *bottom* in a relationship in which he or she plays the role of a somewhat dependent, sometimes rather childlike person. The top in such a relationship usually, but not always, identifies as a *daddy* or sometimes a *mommy*. Daddy/boy relationships and their ilk are more common among gay men and lesbians (daddies, mommies,

boys and girls can all be of any gender), but are not unknown among heterosexuals.

Cage: Pretty much what it sounds like – a large square wood or metal box with bars in which a *bottom* can be confined. Some cages are small and uncomfortable and meant for short-term scenes, others are larger and more comfortable, for longer periods of confinement.

Cane: A long narrow flexible stick, usually of rattan, used for striking the buttocks. This is not the same as the heavy rigid cane used for walking; it's also not the same as the much longer and heavier rattan canes used for judicial punishment in Singapore. It is more like the canes used on public school children in Victorian England – designed to hurt but not to do long-term damage.

Clamp: A small spring device which can be attached to a pinch of skin to create intense sensation. The most commonly used clamp is a plain wooden spring clothespin. Other kinds are made of plastic or metal, but are comparable in size and intensity to clothespins.

Clip: Another word for a *clamp*.

Collar: A decorative piece of leather or metal worn around the neck, often as a symbol of a *dominant/submissive* or *owner/slave* relationship. Many people put on the collar to signal that they are going to start their *scene*, and take it off to signal that the scene is over. Others wear their collar all the time, like a wedding ring.

Consensual: This is probably the most important term in this book. Consensual means, quite simply, that everyone involved has

consented to everything that will happen. Kinkyfolk tend to have very high standards for what constitutes consent. Consent must be affirmative – it isn't enough to not say "no," everyone must actively say "yes." Consent must also be given by someone who understands the ramifications of his behavior, who is of age, and who is not significantly intoxicated. Consent may be withdrawn at any time with the understanding that the scene will stop at that point; many players use a *safeword* for this.

Crop: A long narrow shaft with a flexible leather tip, designed to encourage recalcitrant horses to get moving but adapted by kinkyfolk as a striking device for people. (It actually tickles the horse, but on human hide it stings.)

Cutting: This term sounds way scarier than it really is. Cutting is sometimes done in a ritual or kinky setting, either with the purpose of leaving a mark or just for the sensation. However, the cuttings done by knowledgeable kinkyfolk are very shallow – typically about as deep as a cat scratch. Cutting is not an activity for beginners, or for anybody who hasn't been taught by an experienced practitioner.

Cybersex: When two people, who may be thousands of miles apart, use their computers and modems to enact a "scene," that's cybersex. Typically, the *top* describes what she's doing to the bottom, and the *bottom* describes his responses. (He may or may not actually be physically following orders from the top at the time.) Cybersex is a little bit like collaboratively writing an erotic story. These days, it is many people's first exploration of *kink*.

Daddy: The *top* in a *daddy/boy* or *daddy/girl* relationship. Daddies

can be strict and demanding or loving and indulgent – sometimes both.

Dominance & Submission: Some people use this as a synonym for *S/M*, *leathersex*, and other terms of that nature. Other people use it specifically to mean play in which most of the eroticism comes from one player's mental control of another (as differentiated from play that is mostly about physical sensation).

Dominant: Some people use this to mean someone who specifically enjoys controlling his *submissive's* behavior, more likely to give orders than sensations. Others use it as a generic term for a *top* – the person who is in charge of a *scene*.

Dominatrix: a female *dominant*. Sometimes used specifically to mean a *pro-domme*.

Drag: Halloween for grownups. The classic drag, of course, is a flashy trashy outrageous woman's outfit worn by a man. (One story of the term's origin is that it's an acronym for "Dressed As a Girl" – note that its opposite, then, would be "drab.") However, the term has been expanded to any kind of *kinky* costumery – pirate drag, cowboy drag, baby drag and so on.

Dungeon: Any space set up for *S/M*. A dungeon may be a corner of a bedroom, or it might be a complete suite of rooms designed and equipped especially for *play*.

Edge Play: Play that pushes or expands a player's physical or emotional limits. The definition of edge play varies according to

your personal edges – a scene that seems perfectly simple to one player may feel very edgy and difficult to another. Edge players are usually very experienced folk who make informed decisions about what risks they are willing to take.

Endorphins: These are the chemicals released by the brain in response to strong physical or emotional sensations. (They're what causes the "runner's high" that helps keep distance runners motivated.) Both bottoms and tops may experience "endorphin rushes," which leave them feeling relaxed and happy, from *S/M play*.

Exhibitionist: Someone who receives erotic pleasure from being watched while doing something sexual. Ethical exhibitionists, in contrast to popular images of seedy men in raincoats, enjoy their kink only with the full consent of one or more voyeurs who enjoy watching them.

Fantasy: A sexual fantasy is something that a person enjoys thinking about in order to turn herself on sexually. People may enjoy fantasizing while they daydream, while they masturbate, or while they have sex. It's important to recognize that just because someone has a fantasy does not mean they have the desire, or the intention, to act on it. Some fantasies are physically impossible, some would be far too dangerous, some would be unethical or illegal. (Getting spanked by Clark Gable is simply not an option, more's the pity) Most kinkyfolk have pretty good boundaries between their fantasies and what they actually do. We're good at thinking up let's-pretend games that give us some of the flavor of our fantasy while leaving out the difficult or risky parts.

Fetish: “What I like is *normal*; what you like is a little *kinky*; what he likes is a *fetish*.” In the classic sense, a fetish is a sexual attachment to an inanimate object, body part or body fluid that isn’t sexual to most people. Some fairly common fetishes are feet and shoes, leather, rubber and hair. Some people also use the word “fetish” to talk about a preferred activity such as spanking or infantilism, or about a preferred body type, but we won’t use it that way in this book.

Fisting: Inserting the entire hand, slowly and gradually, into the vagina (“vaginal fisting”) or the anus (“anal fisting”). The word “fisting” is something of a misnomer, since the hand is not balled up into a fist when it is inserted. Properly done fisting is neither painful nor dangerous.

Flagging: Signaling one’s kinky desires by wearing a colored handkerchief or other symbol. The color of the hanky signifies what you like to do, the side you wear it on (in a back pocket or tied around a boot) lets people know whether you want to top or bottom.

Flogger: A device made of many long narrow pieces of leather or other flexible material attached to a handle, for striking purposes. Please don’t picture Simon Legree or your favorite pirate movie when you hear about “flogging” – modern floggers are made specifically to use on human skin for the purpose of pleasure, crafted to offer carefully controlled sensation with no real damage.

FtM or *FtoM*: a *transsexual* who was born with the physical characteristics of a woman but who now lives as a man, often with the assistance of hormones and/or surgery.

Gag: A device used to restrict a bottom's speech – often, a strap or piece of cloth that covers the open mouth and fastens behind the head.

Handballing: Another word for *fisting*.

Infantilism: Play in which one or more adults play the role of an infant.

Kidnapping: A special-occasion *S/M* scene – often a birthday present – in which one or more tops, with careful *pre-negotiation*, “abduct” a willing bottom away from home, work or a semi-public place, carry him off to a *dungeon* or someone's home, and do various delicious things to him.

Kinky: This is one of those terms that is so vague as to be nearly useless. For some people, leaving the lights on, or sleeping in the nude, is incredibly kinky. Others don't begin to feel like they're getting kinky until Fellini shows up with a movie camera. Kinky may mean that someone is into *S/M*, that he's a *transvestite*, that he enjoys *public sex* or multi-partner sex or *voyeurism*, that he has a *fetish*... If someone tells you he's kinky, your best bet is to ask, “What do you mean by that exactly?”

Leather Conference: A get-together of kinkyfolk for the purpose of networking, sharing information, and a bit of cruising. Leather conferences range in length from a day to a long weekend, and in size from small regional conferences to huge international ones with hundreds of attendees. Most conferences include *workshops*, *play parties*, *munches* and more.

Leatherman/Leatherwoman: A man or woman who identifies as part of the leather or S/M community. These terms are in wider use among gay men and lesbians than among heterosexuals, but the usage is spreading throughout all kinkyfolk.

Leathersex: Yet another synonym for *SM* or *BDSM* or *power exchange* or what-have-you. Probably in widest use in the gay male community, but others use it too. By the way, if someone tells you he's "into leather," you'll have to ask him to find out whether he means he has a leather *fetish* or he's into *S/M*; both meanings are in common usage.

Masochist: Someone who receives sexual or erotic pleasure from some forms of physical *pain*. It isn't true that just because someone is a masochist, she enjoys all forms of pain – masochists don't like root canal work or stubbed toes any more than you do. It would be more accurate to think of a masochist as someone whose range of desirable erotic sensation is simply wider than most people's.

Master: Someone who is in an ongoing, committed relationship in which he (or sometimes she) has received his partner's consent to control many aspects of her or his behavior. Some people use this as a synonym for *dominant*. Also sometimes an honorific for a dominant ("Master Tom," "Master Nancy," etc.). We use the first definition in this book.

Mistress: The female (or female-identified) analog of a *master*.

MtF or MtoF: a *transsexual* who was born with the physical

characteristics of a man but who now lives as a woman, often with the assistance of hormones and/or surgery.

Munch: A social get-together of kinkyfolk in a restaurant or similar location. Munches started as a way for Internet-based kinkyfolk to meet face-to-face (or, as Netfolk put it, “F2F”).

Negotiation: It’s hard for many people to believe, but kinkyfolk typically spend a lot of time talking about what we’re going to do together before we actually do it. During negotiation, we talk about what kinds of activities we like, what kinds we don’t like, and what kinds are absolutely not okay with us. We share information about physical and emotional limitations. We choose a *safeword* or other way of signalling the status of *consent*. We also tell each other anything we might know about how we typically react to *play* and how we like to be taken care of during and afterwards.

Normal: What a loaded term this is! We don’t even know what it means. Many people worry about their kinky friends or relatives because these people aren’t “normal.” We don’t think normal is necessarily a very good thing to be – for example, a “normal” American reads less than one book a year. (By reading this book this year, you’ve just become “abnormal”!) Better questions to ask might be, “Is my kinky person happy? Is she growing? Is she forming satisfying relationships? Is she taking good care of herself?”

Ownership: A consensual agreement in which a *Master* or *Mistress* has the right to control many or most aspects of the life of a *slave*. The parameters of many owner/slave relationships are defined by a

written or spoken ownership contract, which outlines the rights and responsibilities of everybody involved for the length of the contract.

Paddle: A largish flattish piece of wood, plastic or leather with a handle, designed for striking the buttocks. Please don't picture the paddles used in fraternity hazings; most paddles used in *spanking* and S/M are smaller, lighter and less dangerous.

Pain. This is a scary word. Most people's experience of pain comes from things like migraine headaches – no wonder it's hard to understand how someone can be erotically turned on by pain! For people who enjoy it, pain in the context of a loving and consensual interaction literally feels completely different, and often very erotic. Nobody knows for sure whether people who like pain are neurologically different than other folks or whether they've just learned to process sensation differently; your authors strongly suspect the latter.

Pedophilia: A sexual desire for children. Many kinkyfolk enjoy *age play* with consenting adults pretending to be children, but ethical kinkyfolk do not have sex or do S/M with actual children. To do so is both illegal and wrong.

Persona: More Jung here. A persona is an aspect of yourself that comes out in certain situations. Most people have some experience with different personae; if you have a friend, for example, who makes you feel like a teenager again, giggly and silly, that's one of your personae coming out. Many kinkyfolk have one or more erotic personae that they like to play with – a man who has a female persona (or vice versa), a grown woman who likes to pretend to be a

little girl, and so on. It is interesting to note that the words “persona” and “person” both derive from the character masks of Greek theater – so in some sense, whatever you’re doing, you’re playing a part.

Pervert/Perv: An affectionate term that kinkyfolk use to refer to ourselves, in much the same way that many lesbians call themselves “dykes”: Catherine and her sister were chatting in their mother’s living room a couple of years back. Their mom walked through just in time to hear Catherine refer to herself as a “pervert,” and cringed visibly. “Mom, it’s OK,” Catherine tried to reassure her. “Just like Sis and her friends call each other ‘dykes,’ my friends and I call each other ‘perverts.’” “Oh, I know that,” responded Mom. “I was just wondering how I got lucky enough to have one of each!”

Phone Sex: Comparable to *cybersex* except using a telephone instead of a computer. The participants in phone sex arouse one another by describing erotic things they’d like to do to one another, and enjoying their partner’s reaction. They often masturbate while doing so. Phone sex is often done professionally by paid phone sex workers, but is also often done by non-professional partners who are separated by distance or circumstance.

Piercing: Piercing may be done as a permanent body modification, to give the recipient a place to wear jewelry. Common places to pierce (in addition to the ears) are noses, eyebrows, tongues, nipples, navels and genitals. People with piercings may or may not be into S/M. Some people also like to play with temporary piercings, typically just below the skin almost anywhere on the body, just for the sensation of being pierced. All competent piercings, whether temporary or permanent, are done with sterile needles by knowledgeable practitioners.

Play: To do *S/M* together. We like this verb, because we think *S/M* has most of the same elements of ritual, symbolism and collaboration as other kinds of play (from chess to cops-and-robbers).

Play Party: A get-together of kinkyfolk, anywhere from a handful to hundreds of us, for the purpose of playing in the same space – sometimes to take advantage of special equipment or an extra-nice room, sometimes just for the pleasure of enjoying one another’s energy. People in these environments may play with their regular partner(s) or with someone else, or several someone elses.

Players: People who do *S/M*.

Playroom: Another word for a dungeon.

Polyamory: An arrangement in which a person has more than one lover, with the active consent of everybody involved. Many kinkyfolk are monogamous, but there are probably more polyamorous people in the kink communities than elsewhere.

Power exchange: Yet another (slightly euphemistic) term for *S/M*. Also sometimes “erotic power exchange” or “power play.”

Pro-Domme: Shorthand for “professional *dominant*”: a woman who gets paid to help clients enact their *masochistic* or *submissive* fantasies, usually non-sexually. There are male professional dominants too; most of them work with male clients. Also, there are

a few professional submissives of both genders, usually working (for safety reasons) with one or more professional dominants.

Public sex: It amazes us to realize that most Americans have never watched another human being having sex. Many kinkyfolk like to get together and *have play parties*. The authors of this book, and many other kinky people, very much enjoy this kind of public sex, but draw the line at any kind of sex that involves people who have not consented to participate (such as the other folks riding the bus).

Punishment scene: A scene in which the bottom is being punished for some infraction. This may be “play punishment” – in which the bottom didn’t really do anything wrong but just enjoys the fantasy of punishment. Or the players involved may be in a relationship where one has given the other the right to punish him for mistakes or misbehavior.

Restraints: *Bondage* devices, usually of leather or webbing, which go around wrists, ankles and other body parts and can be fastened to one another or to stationary objects.

Role: Just as actors in plays have roles, so do players in scenes. A role may be as simple as “the one who gets tied up,” or something a bit more theatrical – like a pirate or a baby or a queen.

S/M: Yet another synonym for *BDSM/leathersex/power exchange/et al*. You’ll sometimes see it punctuated differently, as “SM” or “S&M.”

Sadist: Someone who receives erotic pleasure from giving pain to

her partners. Yes, we know this word sounds absolutely terrifying – but please remember that kinkyfolk who identify as sadists are typically very ethical about giving pain only to those who have given their full *consent*. And if they don't offer the kind of pain that pleases, nobody will play with them.

Sadomasochism: Yet another synonym for *S/M*. The word “sadomasochism” is a mixture of the names of two eighteenth-century writers: the Marquis de Sade, who wrote books like “Juliette” and “Ninety Days of Sodom,” and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, who wrote a book called “Venus in Furs.” De Sade in particular was not representative of the philosophy of modern-day kinkyfolk – in fact, he engaged in and wrote about behaviors that would get him kicked out of any S/M club in the country. (Please don't read de Sade for clues about what your kinky person is doing!)

Safe/Sane/Consensual: This is a slogan that has been in widespread use throughout the S/M communities for many years; we use it to distinguish between what we do and real-world abuse and violence. While definitions differ, most of us mean by “safe” that everybody involved is aware of any risks and has taken all possible steps to reduce those risks – some also add that in S/M, we do not do physical or emotional damage that requires professional intervention to heal. By “sane,” we mean that everybody involved has one another's well-being as their paramount goal, and that everybody is together enough (and sober enough) to understand the ramifications of their actions. By “consensual,” we mean that everybody involved has given their active and uncoerced *consent* to everything that will happen in the scene.

Safer sex: Sex in which everybody involved has taken precautions

to minimize the possibility of transmitting a disease, most often by using latex barriers like condoms and gloves. This term has come to be preferred over “safe sex,” since sex never has been and never will be entirely safe.

Safeword: A code word that many kinkyfolk use to signal the status of consent. Many of us like to pretend that we aren’t consenting, so we may cry out words like “no,” “please” and “stop” as part of our fantasy. A safeword is a word that wouldn’t otherwise come up in the scene, that tells our partner that we really do need to stop. Many of us use “yellow” to mean “This is getting too intense for me, I need to you to slow down,” and “red” to mean “Something is wrong, I need you to stop.” (“Green,” of course, means “This is great, let’s do more!”)

Scene: A predetermined period of time during which two or more people do S/M. Also, sometimes, the whole S/M community and its doings (“Is he in the scene?”).

Sensory Deprivation: a scene in which the top takes away one or more of the bottom’s senses – a blindfold to remove sight, earplugs for hearing, special bondage that restricts touch, and so on.

Session: A synonym for scene. Sometimes used especially for a scene with a *pro-domme*.

Sex radical: Someone who challenges cultural beliefs about what sex should be like. Some sex radicals dress in drag or leather or diapers and march down Market Street, others quietly influence the people around them by simply living out their sexual philosophies

without secrecy or apology. Not all sex radicals are kinky, and not all kinky people are sex radicals.

Sexual minority: Anybody whose sexual desires or practices place them out of the mainstream – which means just about anybody, at least at some time in their lives. However, the term “sexual minority” is most often used to mean gays, lesbians, bisexuals, *transgendered* folk and kinkyfolk.

Sexual politics: Anyplace that sex and politics intersect, you have sexual politics. Sexual politics may be about governmental issues like same-sex marriage, or about interpersonal issues like *public sex*.

Slave: Someone who has given the right to control many aspects of his behavior to a *master* or *mistress*. Remember, consensual slavery is entirely different from institutional slavery: if a consensual slave doesn't like what's happening, she can renegotiate or leave.

Spanking: Striking on the buttocks with a hand or implement – as part of a *punishment scene* or just for fun. Many folks who enjoy spanking don't consider themselves to be into *S/M*. There are special *support groups*, *play parties* and Internet groups especially for spanking fans.

Submissive: Someone who receives erotic pleasure from giving up control of some aspects of her behavior, as opposed to receiving physical sensation: in the words of one submissive woman we know, “My fantasy is to be a heroic good girl, and so I like it even better if my dominant makes it difficult for me to be good.” Some people use this as a generic term for anybody who enjoys being the

“receiver” in *BDSM*.

Support group: A club or organization where kinkyfolk can meet each other, share information and resources, get help with some of their questions and concerns, and socialize together. There are support groups for just about any kink you can imagine – *fetishes* of all kinds, *infantilism*, *spanking*, *cross-dressing*, *S/M* and many, many more.

Suspension: A form of specialized *bondage* in which the bottom’s body is supported by ropes or other restraints off the floor.

Swinging: An activity in which (usually heterosexual) couples get together in order to have sex in groups, or with someone other than their usual partners.

Tantra: A type of yoga (the literal translation of the word is “woven together”) which includes sexual ritual as a pathway to interpersonal intimacy and spiritual ecstasy.

Titleholder: Many local S/M communities hold competitions for titles like “Ms. Cleveland Leather” and “Mr. Miami Leather.” Contestants compete on the basis of their contributions to their local communities, their articulateness as spokespersons, and their creativity in putting together choreographed skits/scenes enacting various *kinky* scenarios. Winners win a leather sash with their title in studs and the opportunity to compete nationally. Each winner serves for one year as a representative of his or her local (or national) leather community, and is also expected to put on events and raise funds for charity.

Top: A generic term for the person who takes control of her partner's behavior, sensations, movement or emotions – the dominant, sadist, master, mistress, daddy or what-have-you. Some people use this term specifically to mean someone who erotically enjoys giving strong sensation. We use the first definition in this book.

Torture: Another scary word! Kinkyfolk use “torture” to mean many forms of erotic pain, ranging from mild to intense – usually on erotically sensitive parts of the body (“cock and ball torture,” “tit torture,” etc.). Like all forms of *S/M* we discuss in this book, erotic “torture” is done safely and consensually, and is designed to please.

Toy: Any item used for *sex* or *S/M*. *Vibrators, dildos, restraints, bondage* equipment, *whips, clamps* and so on are all toys. Players on their way to a *play party* pack their toys in a toybag.

Transformation scene: A scene in which one or more guides help transform a person into another gender than his or her usual one. Most often a woman transforms a man into a woman, but the imaginations of kinkyfolk are limitless...

Transgender: An umbrella term for anyone whose sense of their own gender is not firmly rooted in either “male” or “female.” *Transsexuals* and some *transvestites* consider themselves transgendered.

Transsexual: Someone who lives in a sex that is not the one with which they were born. Transsexuals may or may not have had

surgery to change the appearance and function of their genitals. Most but not all of them take hormones to change their physical appearances and voices. The authors of this book consider it a major breach of etiquette to refer to a transsexual by the wrong pronoun (to call a male-to-female transsexual “he,” for example).

Transvestite: Anyone who enjoys wearing the clothes of another gender. Some transvestites cross-dress for erotic pleasure, others to express an alternate *persona*, and still others simply because they feel more comfortable and at home while cross-dressed.

24/7: A *dominant/submissive* relationship in which the partners relate to one another as dominant and submissive at all times (“24 hours a day seven days a week”). This typically doesn’t mean that these people are acting dominant or submissive toward one another while they watch TV or tend the garden, but that they move fluidly into those roles and back out of them according to their circumstances and mood, rather than setting up a special scene for that purpose.

Vanilla: Kinkyfolks’ term for non-kinkyfolks, or for non-kinky sex. This is not intended as an insult – as Catherine notes, “Vanilla is my second-favorite kind of sex.”

Verbal abuse: Play in which one partner yells at another or calls him nasty names – e.g., “Get down on your worthless knees, you slut.” (We wish there were another word than “abuse” for this, since we don’t think consensual and mutually desired play is abusive.)

Voyeur: Someone who enjoys watching someone else doing

something sexual – the natural partner of the *exhibitionist*. Ethical voyeurs watch only when invited.

Watersports: There are two meanings for this word. One is play involving urine – most often one partner urinating on another. The other is play involving enemas. If you're not sure what someone means by "watersports," you'll have to ask.

Whip: Endlessly creative kinkyfolk make whips out of just about every imaginable material, creating sensations from the gentlest caress to intense pain. If you hear that your kinky person has bought himself a whip, please don't picture an Indiana Jones bullwhip – the actual implement is far more likely to be a flogger of the softest, most sensual doeskin.

Workshop: A class in which someone with expertise in a particular technique or subject shares her knowledge with others. A workshop might include lectures, discussion, paper handouts, and/or demonstrations. Workshops are often put on by *support groups* or at *leather conferences*.

Zoophilia: another word for *bestiality*.

Resource Guide

GOOD GENERAL COMMUNICATIONS GUIDES

The Dance of Intimacy, by Harriet Goldhor Lerner, Ph.D. Harper & Row, New York, 1986.

The Intimate Enemy: How to Fight Fair in Love and Marriage, by Dr. George R. Bach and Peter Wyden. Avon Books, New York, 1968.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON ALTERNATIVE SEXUAL PRACTICES

Books:

The Bottoming Book: Or, How to Get Terrible Things Done to You By Wonderful People, by Dossie Easton & Catherine A. Liszt. Greenery Press, 1995.

Consensual Sadomasochism: How to Talk About It and How to Do It Safely, by William Henkin, Ph.D. and Sybil Holiday. Daedalus Press, 1996.

Different Loving : The World of Sexual Dominance and Submission, by Gloria G. Brame, Will Brame, Jon Jacobs. Villard

Books, 1996.

The Good Vibrations Guide to Sex, by Cathy Winks & Anne Semans. Cleis Press, 1994.

Leatherfolk: Radical Sex, People, Politics, and Practice, by Mark Thompson. Alyson Books, 2000.

My Husband Wears My Clothes: Crossdressing from the Perspective of a Wife, by Peggy J. Rudd. PM Publishers, 1999.

SM 101: A Realistic Introduction, by Jay Wiseman. Greenery Press, 1996.

The Topping Book: Or, Getting Good at Being Bad, by Dossie Easton & Catherine A. Liszt. Greenery Press, 1998.

Websites:

The Society for Human Sexuality, at the University of Washington at Seattle, sponsors an excellent general-interest sexuality website at www.sexuality.org.

San Francisco Sex Information (which also maintains a wonderful sex information telephone line at 415/989-SFSI) has another great general site at www.sfsi.org.

For questions specifically about BDSM and related practices, try the detailed site at bdsm.about.com.

Organizations:

The Society of Janus is a general-interest BSDM organization, headquartered in San Francisco, for people of all genders and orientations – www.soj.org, P.O. Box 426794, San Francisco, CA 94142, 415/ 292-3222. The Eulenspiegel Society is a similar organization in New York – www.tes.org. P.O. Box 2783, New York, NY 10163, 212/388-7022. Although these are the largest and best-known BDSM support and education groups, dozens of others exist in other cities and can be found through the websites listed above.

IFGE (International Foundation for Gender Education).
www.ifge.org P.O Box 367, Wayland, MA 01778.

IF THE PERSON YOU LOVE IS GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL OR TRANSGENDERED

Books:

Coming Out to Parents : A Two-Way Survival Guide for Lesbians and Gay Men and Their Parents, by Mary V. Borhek. Pilgrim Press, 1993.

Loving Someone Gay, by Donald H. Clark. Celestial Arts, 1997.

The Transsexual's Survival Guide II: To Transition & Beyond, for Family, Friends & Employers, by JoAnn Altman Stringer. Creative Design Services, 1992.

When Sons and Daughters Choose Alternative Lifestyles, by Mariana Caplan, M.A. Hohm Press, 1996.

Organizations:

P-FLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays).
www.pflag.org. 726 M Street NW, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20036, 202-467-8180.

FOR HELP WITH THERAPISTS, PHYSICIANS, ETC.

Books:

Health Care Without Shame: A Handbook for the Sexually Diverse and Their Caregivers, by Charles Moser, Ph.D., M.D. Greenery Press, San Francisco, 1999.

Websites:

Kink-Aware Professionals. Author/educator Race Bannon maintains a list on the World Wide Web of therapists, physicians, attorneys and other professionals who are open to working with clients with nontraditional sexualities: it's at www.bannon.com/kap.