

Why BDSM is not Abuse

When a man or a woman spans someone, it does not mean that abuse is present. Some people enjoy giving or receiving restraint, control or intense sensations the way other people enjoy sex in the dark.

That said, domestic abuse is a serious problem. Whether it's physical, sexual or emotional, domestic abuse is devastating. It is hurtful regardless of the gender of the abuser or abused.

Whether something is BDSM or abuse very often hinges on what is negotiated between two people – that is, based on what they have agreed to do or not to do. It depends on how people responded to what passes between them – does the receiving partner (the “submissive” or “bottom”) like it or appreciate it; or does that person dislike it or resent it.

Here are some differences between bdsm and abuse:

BD/SM	Abuse
Consensual	No one agrees to be abused
Leaves both partners feeling better afterward	Leaves people feeling worse afterward (at least the abused person)
Is generally negotiated or discussed beforehand, which attention paid to limits	There is no agreement to be abused
One person controls another and is in control of him or herself	One partner is out of control – often driven by anger – and it can be chaotic
Is sought out by both parties	Abuse is not requested
Can uplift people	Damages people
Often done by people who are part of a bdsm community	Happens in isolation
Is about intimacy and erotic feelings	Separates people and is not sexual

If you know someone who is doing consensual bdsm it probably is negotiated beforehand, involves their intimate and erotic interaction, leaves them better off afterward, and can happen in the context of other people who do similar things.

More than 20 BDSM groups participated in putting together a statement on BDSM vs. Abuse. It can be found at <http://www.the-crucible.com/bdsm.htm>

There are warning signs that indicate abuse. Abuse can be present when a significant other threatens to hurt you, your children, other family members, pets or friends, or keeps you away from them; keeps you from going where you want, when you want; has sudden outbursts of anger or rage; destroys personal property or sentimental items; keeps you from bank accounts, credit cards, or car; forces you to have sex or to engage in sexual acts you do not enjoy; insults you or calls you derogatory names; or turns minor incidents into major arguments. Here are local organizations and websites you can go to for more information or help including:

Domestic Abuse Counseling Center

<http://www.dacc.net/>

Womansplace

<http://www.womansplace.org/index.php>

Women's Center and Shelter:

<http://www.wcpittsburgh.org/>