

# SSC and RACK

## What are they and what do they mean?

Both SSC and RACK serve a dual purpose. First they act as a guideline for us to engage in safe B/D S/M play. Secondly, they are a “public relations” slogan to counter a generally sensationalist view of “the lifestyle” portrayed in the media (and held by the public at large) as “crazed predators, partaking in ghoulish activities and preying upon unwilling victims”.

Both SSC and RACK are acronyms. SSC stands for “Safe, Sane and Consensual” while RACK refers to “Risk Aware Consensual Kink”. The basic tenets of each are as follows:

### SSC

What constitutes safe and sane differs from individual to individual, based upon their knowledge and experience level, preparation, emotional state of mind, physical limitations, etc. In this way, it is relative to each individual, rather than an absolute that is the same for everyone. The constituent components of SSC are:

**Safe:** SSC implies that individuals participate in “safe” activities (understanding that no activity, even crossing the street, is without risk). As extreme (and hopefully obvious) examples, death and dismemberment would not be considered “safe” activities. Even “edge play” (the more “extreme” B/D S/M activities) can (and should) be practiced safely.

SSC also requires that individuals remain within their level of knowledge and experience in order for an activity to be “safe” (ie: pilots may safely fly planes, but I do not have the training to do so). It is not safe for all people to engage in every B/D S/M activity, because they may not all have the same abilities, training, or experience as others.

Where’s that line drawn between safe and unsafe? It differs from individual to individual (ie: it is relative to those in the scene) and activity to activity (ie: experience and training in each specific B/D S/M activity).

**Sane:** SSC necessitates that both individuals are of sound mind (ie: sane), and that the activity is “sane” as well (participating, even consensually, in removal of a perfectly healthy limb would not be sane). I often view the term “sane” as a bridge between “safe” and “consensual” in that participation in unsafe or nonconsensual activities (considering the likely results of that participation) is “insane”. Or, in

other words, you'd have to be "insane" (or, at the very least, immensely stupid and/or criminal) to expose yourself to the legal liabilities associated with forced participation, or to knowingly engage in an activity whose likely outcome is injury or death (which carries its own civil and criminal liability as well).

**Consensual:** It's tempting to view consent as the simple utterance of the word "yes", but it has a far broader interpretation. Children can't offer consent. People under the influence of drugs or alcohol can't offer consent. People who are uninformed (don't know what they are authorizing) can't offer consent. Those that are unable to say "no" (whether through intimidation, an overwhelming desire to please, or are in the throes of "subspace" for example) can't offer consent. And, of course, forcing your kink upon those that do not desire to participate is nonconsensual (ie: that is what distinguishes an exhibitionist from a "flasher").

For your own safety (including protection from additional civil and criminal liabilities), and that of your partner, be absolutely certain that unfettered consent is present.

## **RACK**

What constitutes "acceptable" risk differs from individual to individual. The concept of RACK is such that each participant is fully informed, and makes their own decisions based upon that information.

**Risk:** Everything we do involves an element of risk, because everything we do involves an element of danger, however insignificant that may be. Whether taking a shower, walking across the street, or driving a car... everything has the potential to harm us. RACK requires that each participant comprehend the level of risk associated with a specific activity, and the distinct individuals participating in that activity (their knowledge, experience, training, etc.)

**Aware:** Participants must be aware of the unique nature of everyone engaged in a specific activity. That includes their particular preferences, limits, limitations (ie: health issues), etc. No two people engage in an activity exactly alike. Being aware means communicating, listening and negotiating until all the participants come to an understanding of how an activity will be conducted.

**Consensual:** Just as in SSC, consent is a broad interpretation (see the definition above). Be absolutely certain, for your safety and protection, that real consent is present.

**Kink:** The specific B/D S/M activities in which we participate can also be called "kinks". Kinks are rather personal and unique to us all. It's important to understand the unique nature of each other's kink such that we can derive the greatest pleasure from our participation in it. Communicating that to the other

participant(s) in the activity will allow them to incorporate your kink into the scene, or inform them of your intentions to do so. It's never acceptable to "force" your kink upon someone else that might not be willing to participate in it, or who was not informed of your intentions (surprises are not often appreciated).

## **Where do they come from?**

The phrase "Safe, Sane and Consensual" is generally attributed to Slave David Stein who coined it as a slogan in 1983 for the Gay Male S/M Activists (GMSMA).

The origin of "Risk Aware Consensual Kink" is less clear, though I have seen a few attributions to Gary Switch from the late 1990's.

## **My personal views on SSC and RACK:**

I should preface this in two ways. First (and foremost), I wholly endorse using either SSC or RACK, as they both have the net effect of causing us to think about (and do) the things that keep all of us safer (though, not without risk). And second, these are my personal views. Neither I nor anyone else can (or should) speak for the entirety of "the lifestyle". I'm sharing my opinions here simply in hopes of generating some thought for you, the reader, as to which (SSC or RACK) best meets your needs.

In my estimation, RACK is a much more appropriate guideline for scenes involving strangers or acquaintances. It is more focused upon actual negotiation, and more equally distributes the responsibility amongst all the participants in a scene. Given that the vast majority of those in "the lifestyle" have a specific interest (and motivation) to participate solely in B/D S/M activities (as opposed to power exchange relationships), it's not uncommon (in fact, it's quite widespread) for Tops and bottoms to scene with several different partners. And given that they may not share an intimate knowledge of one another, it makes sense that each participant would accept the full responsibility for the circumstances of their individual participation.

My personal lifestyle interest is in power exchange relationships, and my scening takes place within the context of those relationships. So I don't have the need to negotiate with strangers or acquaintances. Consequently, I find that the concepts of SSC are more congruent with my role as a Dominant in a power exchange relationship, in that I accept a greater degree of responsibility and control in my submissive's life (including our scenes).

**As a Top or a Dominant, it's unavoidable that we accept a greater degree of responsibility when scening. Both in terms of our oversight responsibility for the scene itself (after all, we are the ones in control, even if only for the duration of a scene), as well as the civil and criminal liabilities associated with many B/D S/M activities. And given that I accept that greater control and liability, I am uncomfortable in sharing (equally) the decision-making process inherent to RACK.**

**Some people are uncomfortable with the fact that SSC is not "uniformly" applied to all people in that it is relative to each individual (ie: their state of mind, ability, knowledge, training, experience, etc.). But that's precisely the beauty I find in SSC, in that it is adaptable to each of us as individuals. Ignoring those differences adds (in my opinion) an element of danger to scening that is completely unnecessary.**

**Those that are uncomfortable with the flexibility inherent to SSC find reassurance in the more rigid application of RACK, in that it relieves them of (some) responsibility to make "judgments" about their partner(s), or others engaged in their own scene (such as a Dungeon Monitor must do). The emphasis is placed upon individual informed consent (absent much "judgment" regarding the other participant(s) in the scene). And while that may have an enticing quality to it (so many fear that "judgments" are tantamount to "intolerance"), I can think of many instances when information and consent alone (in the absence of "good judgment") were utterly insufficient in determining someone's capacity to safely participate in an activity. Theoretically, two individuals could be fully aware that the intent and construction of a scene is designed to culminate in death or dismemberment, consensually agree to participate, and still be within the bounds of RACK. And while that is, admittedly, an extreme example, it rather explicitly demonstrates what I consider to be RACK's significant shortcomings.**

**I am, admittedly, predisposed towards SSC. Others favor RACK. Which best fits your needs? Only you can know.**

**Rover**

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