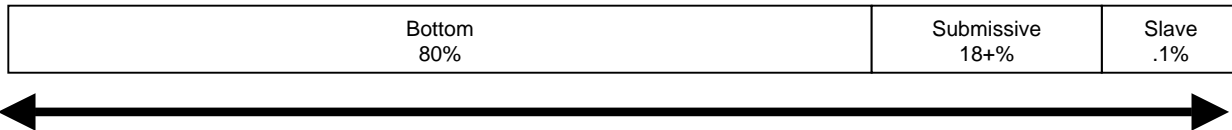


Definitions of Submissiveness

The following are my own definitions of the spectrum of submissiveness found in the BDSM lifestyle. As with any generalizations, they are useful only as a way to visualize social behaviours, not as descriptions of individuals. The definitions reflect my own understanding, which is certain to evolve over time, so these definitions will also be refined as my experience and insight grows.

Population of females engaged in or fantasizing about BDSM (approximately 5% of general population). The figures are entirely my own guesses.



Bottom

- Able to eroticize pain – enjoys receiving sensation intended to be erotic in nature.
- Submit to Tops for a limited period of time (play sessions) with pre-negotiated (explicit or implicit) activities and levels of intensity.
- Outside of play sessions, they are equal to their tops.
- Often view submission outside of play as distasteful or counter to their femininity/individualism.
- Dislike concepts of ownership or belonging to another.
- Often play with more than one Top, focusing primarily on their own pleasure.
- Also occurs within committed relationships as a spice to bedroom sex.
- Fantasies involve kidnapping, rape, forced orgasm, bondage and erotic pain.
- If not part of a committed relationship, generally low maintenance and low emotional involvement for Tops, who are valued primarily for their imagination, range of toys, showmanship and concentration on the safety and pleasure of the bottom.

Submissive

- Feels comfortable to give up power in the presence of the Dom, subtly in public, overtly in private or with D/s friends.
- Feels joy and contentment with the acknowledgement of adoration for their Dom.
- Trust is deep and they accept guidance, but still control their lives in all essential respects – career, friends, activities, etc.
- Find comfort in rules and rituals, but are playful and bantering.
- They make most daily decisions for themselves, depending on the level of submission.
- Erotic pain is less of a concern for soft subs and they submit more because their Dom enjoys it than because of the sexual appeal.
- Rules and rituals are a casual part of the relationship, loosely enforced, with punishments mild or infrequent.
- There is often some form of contract or well-discussed understanding.
- May be 24/7 or part of a committed relationship, but frequently continues to live independently.
- Even if 24/7, a significant portion of the day is outside the D/s framework and most vanilla decisions are made jointly, with relatively little deferment on the part of the sub.

- For Doms, soft subs require much more attention and effort than bottoms. Subs need their adoration returned – the “bond” is two-way and can be intense and romanticized, including vanilla marriage. Generally the more “love” is involved, the less D/s plays a role, although it may continue to be the norm in the bedroom. Doms often lose subs by neglecting their role, letting life become mundane and predictable, thus failing to fulfill the very real need that subs have to be controlled. If the sub continues to desire power exchange and the Dom fails to accept his responsibility, subs often become discontent and leave.
- Polyamory is fairly frequent, most often involving multiple subs rather than multiple Doms.
- Doms often play with other subs without the depth of a poly relationship and may allow their soft sub to play with other Doms, most often in the Dom’s presence.
- There may be a mutual agreement that either party may play with others so long as intentions are declared and the partner has the option to attend the play sessions.

“Interdependent” Slave – Voluntary Servitude

- Submission is 24/7 with only short times outside the D/s relationship with the Master’s permission. Live-in situations are the norm.
- The majority of decisions, vanilla and kinky, are made by the Master who seeks input as he feels necessary.
- The slave is expected to look out for her Master’s best interests, using discretion and intelligence to point things out to her Master, with his permission.
- Rules and rituals play a large part in the relationship, freeing both from having to give/receive directions for common situations. The Master is vigilant and cares that his rules are observed. The Master also keeps the rules and rituals fresh by inventing variations.
- The Master spends considerable time devising new experiences, often disconcerting ones, for the sub, which is something she craves.
- Erotic pain is a frequent part of the relationship. Safewords are often implicit simply because the Master knows the sub very well and reads signals accurately during play.
- The sub may have her own career, but where practical works exclusively with/for her Master.
- The sub may have discretion and responsibility over defined areas and once trained can run these areas independently.
- Dedication is absolute from both parties once the contract is negotiated, usually in writing and for a definite period of time. Collaring is often the ceremonial symbol of their commitment.
- While often monogamous, this varies with the individuals. Polyamory is possible, usually meaning multiple slaves, although the slave is usually the “primary” and feels secure in the Master’s affections.
- Body modification signifying ownership is often used, e.g. branding, cutting, permanent piercings
- The slave’s driving desire is to make her Master’s life more comfortable and enjoyable in as many ways as possible, both outside the bedroom and within it.
- The “love” involved, while deep and mutual, has a very special quality.
- Fantasies involve complete submission to another, total obedience and service.
- Love the concept of being owned, of belonging to another for their pleasure, especially sexually

“Extreme” Slave

At the extreme spectrum of slavery more effort is required of the Master. This form of slavery does not appeal to me.

- The slave prefers to have little input into most decisions (what to where, what to cook, etc.) and wants the Master to be in charge and “strong” at all times.
- Submission is absolute and all requests are obeyed without question or hesitation, humbly and with thanks for the attention, including punishments or pain inflicted for the Master’s pleasure.
- The slave’s comfort is the last consideration and she often feels best when deprived of comfort or of things she would enjoy, e.g. sleeping on the floor, being denied orgasm, etc.
- This extreme form of submission requires a great deal of effort on the part of the Master who must not let things become routine nor miss any small transgression of rules and rituals.
- Crave attention, both praise and punishment, which is expected to be harsh and not necessarily fair. The rougher the slave is treated, the more content she is.
- The slave requires direction and correction to feel truly loved, thus the Master must be ever vigilant to both praise and punish. Any slacking of this vigilance and willingness to punish can prove devastating to the slave and result in the slave leaving the relationship.

THE 9 LEVELS OF SUBMISSION

The following isn't intended as a rigid classification. It was written by Diane Vera and published in The Lesbian S/M Safety Manual, edited by Pat Califia, from Lace/Alyson Press, Boston, 1988, reissued 1990 (still in print).

Within the S/M subculture, different people use the words "submissive and slave" to mean many different things. When submissives say "I want to be your slave," sometimes they mean only that they want to be tied up and whipped. Many professional dominants routinely refer to their (usually _not_ very genuinely submissive clients) as "slaves." At the other extreme, there are people who want to be full-time personal servants, and who truly want to exist solely for their Dom(me)'s use, pleasure and convenience. And there are many shades in between these two extremes.

1.THE OUTRIGHT NON-SUBMISSIVE MASOCHIST or KINKY SENSUALIST.Not into servitude, humiliation or giving up control; just pain and/or spiced-up sensuality, on the masochist's own terms and for the masochist's own direct pleasure (i.e. turned on solely/mainly by one's own bodily sensations rather than by being "used" to gratify one's partner's sadism).

2.PSEUDO-SUBMISSIVE NON-SLAVE. Not into even playing "slave," but into other "submissive" role-playing, e.g. schoolteacher scenes, infantilism, "forced" transvestism. Usually into humiliation, but NOT into servitude, even in play. Dictates the scene to a large degree.

3.PSEUDO-SUBMISSIVE PLAY SLAVE. Likes to play at being a slave; likes to feel subservient; may in some cases like to feel one is being "used" to gratify partner's sadism; may even really serve the dominant in some ways, but only on the "slave's" own terms. Dictates the scene to a large degree; often fetishistic (e.g. foot worshippers).

4.TRUE SUBMISSIVE NON-SLAVE. Really gives up control (only temporarily and within agreed-upon limits), but gets her/his main satisfaction from aspects of submission other than serving or being used by the dominant. Usually turned on by suspense, vulnerability, and/or giving up responsibility. Doesn't dictate the scene except in very general terms, but still seek mainly her/his own direct/pleasure (rather than getting one's pleasure mainly from pleasing the dominant).

5.TRUE SUBMISSIVE PLAY SLAVE. Really gives up control (though only temporarily; only during brief "scenes" and within limits) and gets main satisfaction from serving/being used by dominant-but only for FUN purposes, usually erotic. May/may not be into pain. If so, is turned on by pain indirectly, i.e. enjoys being the object of one's partner's sadism, on which the submissive places very few requirements or restrictions.

6.UNCOMMITTED SHORT-TERM BUT MORE THAN PLAY SEMI-SLAVE. Really gives up control (usually within limits); wants to serve and be used by the dominant; wants to provide practical/non erotic as well as fun/erotic services; but only when the "slave" is in the mood. May even act as a full-time slave for, say, several days at a time, but is free to quit at any time (or at the end of the agreed upon several days). May or may not have long-term relationship with one's Mistress, but, either way, the "slave" has the final say over when she will serve.

7.PART-TIME CONSENSUAL-BUT REAL SLAVE. Has an ongoing commitment to an owner/slave relationship and regards oneself as the dominant's property at all times. Wants to obey and please dom(me) in all aspects of life- practical/non erotic and fun/erotic. Devotes most of time to other commitments (e.g. job) but Dom(me) has first pick of the slave's free time.

8.FULL-TIME LIVE IN CONSENSUAL SLAVE. Within no more than a few broad limits/requirements, the slave regards herself/himself as existing solely for the Dom(me)'s pleasure/well being. Slave in turn expects to be regarded as a prized possession. Not much different from the situation of the traditional housewife, except that within the S/M world the slave's position is more likely to be fully consensual, especially if the slave is male. Within the S/M world, a full time "slave" arrangement is entered into with an explicit awareness of the magnitude carefully, with more awareness of the magnitude of power that is being given up, and hence is usually entered into much more carefully, with more awareness of the possible dangers, and with much clearer and more specific agreements than usually precede the traditional marriage.

9.CONSENSUAL TOTAL SLAVE WITH NO LIMITS. A common fantasy ideal which probably doesn't exist in real life (except in authoritarian religious cults and other situations where the "consent" is induced by brainwashing and/or social or economic pressures, and hence isn't fully consensual). A few S/M purists will insist that you aren't really a slave unless you're willing to do absolutely anything for your Dom(me), with no limits at all. I've met a few people who claimed to be no-limit slaves, but in all cases I have reason to doubt the claim.