

## Time to Play: Language and Negotiation in the Los Angeles BDSM Community

(1)

P: Hi wiggles.

I thought before we played we should just talk a bit,  
so do you have any hard limits?

W: Um, I don't like face slapping,

I don't like watersports,  
uuhh, I'm pretty much like a light to medium,  
so no super super heavy play,  
but um, yeah.

P: Okay, so-

W: Oh, and I haven't done electrical play yet,  
so I'll just say that's a no right now.

P: Is there any kind of play you really want to do,  
something you haven't done before you want to try,  
or things you really like.

W: Um, I can't really think of anything new right now,  
but I really like biting and scratching.

And choking.

And- yeah, breathplay. It's nice.

P: Do you have any health issues that I should know about?

W: Um, my arms and legs hyperextend,  
but it isn't- it isn't really painful,  
so I'm pretty much good to go.

P: And what do you generally use for a safeword?

W: Uh, red and yellow.

And green. yeah.

- P is an experienced Top, and W is a new bottom. P talked her through the negotiation. Since it is one of W's first few scenes, this is a very thorough negotiation.
- The four main areas of scene negotiation (as seen above) are: the bottom's limits, safewords, any relevant medical information, and types of play that either party would especially like to engage in.
- Notice how all activities are coded as *play*.

(2)

B: So, what is it you hope to gain from the session we're going to have.

R: I just expect to have a lot of fun.

B: Okay, (that's acceptable) ((laughs))

Alright, do you have any health problems,  
any::thing I should be aware of

R: Nope, nothing.

B: And you're a heavy player,  
light player

R: uhhh, Medium=

B: =okay Do you have a safe word?

R: I just go with the standard red yellow green.

B: Okay, yeah,  
red **yellow** green.

Okay:::, uum: (0.9)

Are there any preferences for specific types of pain you're not comfortable with?

R: Uuum, nothing on the feet?

I like walking ((laughs))

But, um, other than that,  
not too picky.

- B and R are both experienced players who have played with each other before. As such, their negotiation is cursory
- The same topics of negotiation occurred as in Example (1).
- Notice how B codes R as a *player*, i.e. someone who engages in play. Anyone in a scene is a player; they *play*.
- Coding all activities as *play* allows members of the BDSM community to think of their activities differently than most people would. To the outside world, these activities can be undesirable, scary, or even dangerous or harmful. (An example: W talked about "breathplay". It sounds much more benign than "I like being choked for pleasure" or "erotic asphyxiation".)
- *Play* sounds harmless, it sounds engaging, it sounds lighthearted, and most importantly, it sounds fun. *Players* treat their activities in this way.
- Members of the BDSM community are all very aware of the risks or perceived risks involved with their activities. Everyone reminds each other to "play safe", and just because their activities are fun, it doesn't mean that players do not treat them seriously.
- A motto in the BDSM community is SSC: Safe (make sure to eliminate all reasonable risk), Sane (don't do things that are unfeasible or too difficult to do safely), and Consensual (both parties need to be of age, of sound mind, and agree beforehand to the activities).