

# CONSCIOUS KINK FOR COUPLES

THE BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO USING  
KINKY SEX AND BDSM FOR PLEASURE,  
GROWTH, INTIMACY, AND HEALING

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Names and identifying details of the people in the stories and case studies in this book have been changed to protect privacy.

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# INTRODUCTION



*“I must be a mermaid, Rango. I have no fear of depths and a great fear of shallow living.” ~ Anaïs Nin*

Kinky sex and BDSM can provide much more than carnal kicks.

With the insights and practices in this book, you can use kink and BDSM as you might use other growth or awareness practices like yoga, meditation, or martial arts.

Conscious Kink is an unusual path because it combines explicit sexuality with healing and personal growth, and it does so in a way that welcomes the so-called negative or dark aspects of life, relationships, and self.

While most contemporary personal growth and healing practices emphasize positivity, ascension, and all things light, Conscious Kink is largely a practice of descent. We drop down into earthiness... into our darkness... into murky lower chakra stuff, and we come back to the surface changed. This practice runs contrary to much of what we are socialized to accept and cultivate in ourselves and in our relationships.

Conscious Kink provides a channel for our repressed hungers, and allows us to connect with and through our more troubling desires.

Conscious Kinky Couples feel a calling to challenge themselves by confronting their erotic sadomasochism, their need for control or being controlled, or even their shame.

Perhaps you're just now building courage to broach the subject of kinky sex and BDSM with your partner, to begin having what you imagine will be difficult conversations. Or maybe you're having a hard time internally reconciling your darker fantasies and desires with your ideas about love and what it means to be in a healthy, caring relationship.

If you're called to kink, but you're not sure how to incorporate it into your life, and if you value conscious living, this book is for you.

### **What is “Conscious” Kink?**

Every relationship that I've ever had the honour of witnessing in my work as a marriage counsellor and couples therapist has included aspects of sadism and masochism, cruelty, power struggles, role-play, and various psychological manipulation, headgames, and mindfucks - even as one or both individuals in the relationship work desperately to hide these qualities from themselves or each other; keeping the dark elements buried in unconsciousness, and maintaining a veneer of innocence and normalcy.

The unwillingness to confront one's own complicity in creating the suffering that inevitably arises in a relationship can be understood in part as an avoidance of facing one's own *shadow*; a reluctance to enter into one's own darker realms.

Conscious Kink, in addition to providing sexual or erotic outlets and pleasures, can also become a structure and a practice for revealing, observing, and befriending our dark and shadowy parts.

Sex is a window to our deepest core, to the material of our soul, and by following our kinky desires, and intentionally adding the element of conscious awareness, we end up doing important psycho-emotional work.

Doing this work as a couple, within the sexual/erotic realm, and witnessing each other in the process; this has the power to foster incredible intimacy, growth, and healing. Conscious Kink combines sexual adventurousness with an intention towards awareness, creating a valuable integration practice for life.

### **Three qualities of Conscious Kinky Couples**

Hollywood and popular culture have, predictably, distorted kink and BDSM for their own sensationalist purposes. “The gimp” in Pulp Fiction... the stalker-ish behaviour of Christian Grey in Fifty Shades... these are to real-life kink and BDSM what Tom and Jerry are to real cats and mice: Entertaining perhaps, but mostly bearing little resemblance or relevance to actual kinky people or kink practices.

Real-world kink and BDSM is practiced intelligently, consensually, skillfully, and inspiringly by people across all socio-economic, political, and even religious spectrums. I know kinky social workers, administrators, and public servants. I know kinky social activists, Christians, pagans, and single parents. Welders and

bus drivers can be kinky, so can school teachers and entrepreneurs. Married, single, gay, straight, black, white, privileged, oppressed, happy, sad, fat, thin... you get the idea.

I'm painting this picture to help dispel whatever assumption you might have that only "other" people are attracted to kinky sex. If you're struggling with feeling alone, marginalized, or weird for your (or your partner's) unconventional desires, I assure you that you are in plenty of good company. Many healthy, loving, sensitive, intelligent people are into kink and BDSM.

Conscious Kinky Couples come from all sorts of backgrounds, and show wide variations in preferences, styles, and personality types, but those with some practice under their belt tend to develop three qualities in common. Interestingly, these same three qualities, or more accurately their absence, predictably show up again and again in the work I do with non-kinky "vanilla" client couples. Could Conscious Kinky Couples have something to teach us all?

*1. Conscious Kinky Couples talk openly and explicitly about sex.*

They have the courage to ask for what they want, and to represent themselves sexually. They don't assume that their partner will read their mind. They negotiate to get both partners' needs met. They share their sexual fantasies and desires. Conscious Kinky Couples might use mystery and intrigue intentionally to cultivate turn-on and eroticism, but they're ready to talk candidly about sex, and they don't hide behind assumptions, social convention, or their own shame and wounding.

*2. Conscious Kinky Couples work to heal their sexual shame and wounding.*



The intentional and explicit nature of their sex lives forces Conscious Kinky Couples to confront their shame and wounding repeatedly, often in many different contexts. Their kinky play or BDSM practice may include consensual humiliation or objectification, sadomasochism, erotic power exchange etc. The Conscious Kinky Couple uses these experiences, and the debriefing that follows, as opportunities for self-examination and integration.

*3. Conscious Kinky Couples make time for sex, and they consciously cultivate eroticism in their relationship.*

Lack of time is a universal theme I encounter with the couples I counsel. Kids, work, family, friends, holidays... there's a long list of commitments and priorities that creep in to take precedent over sex. Conscious Kinky Couples, however, are more likely to dedicate time to sex. Conscious Kink gives couples a structure for actively supporting and growing their sex lives, a structure that is sorely missing in many modern relationships.

### **Using this book**

Developing a Conscious Kink practice requires practical, emotional, and intellectual skills. We must bring our whole selves if we want our kink practice to support us in our wholeness.

This book attempts to speak in the languages of both how and why, practical and philosophical, literal and poetic, art and science. Neither technique nor contemplation alone will be sufficient on this path, and so both are honoured and included.

If you want a glossary of key kink and BDSM terminology, it's here. If you want emotional support to help normalize or validate your kinky desires, it's here. If you want to learn about erotic spanking, it's here. If you want a psychological or spiritual context for sadomasochism or sexual dominance and submission, it's here. If you want tips for negotiating with your partner, or setting up a role-play, or if you want to understand why dirty talk is a turn-on sometimes and a turn-off other times, it's here.

This book will provide plenty of ideas, instruction, and guidance to help most people through their first year of Conscious Kink, and for many it will prove robust enough to remain a valuable resource for years to come. Jump around the book however you like. The different sections have different flavours and feels, and will be appealing to different types of people at different times.

The stories I've included from other Conscious Kinky Couples might intrigue, inspire, or arouse upon early readings, and then they might take on deeper meaning as you begin to make your own stories and gain personal perspective.

Please do not take anything you read here as the final word. Be creative, curious, and experimental. Adapt anything in this book in whatever way suits you. Reject anything that offends, hold on to whatever enriches. Even a single idea in these pages can set you on a path that changes everything.

# PART 1

## CONSCIOUS KINK IN CONTEXT: CONCEPTS AND THEORY

### 1. SHADOW INTEGRATION



*“We find that by opening the door to the shadow realm a little, and letting out various elements a few at a time, relating to them, finding use for them, negotiating, we can reduce being surprised by shadow sneak attacks and unexpected explosions.” ~ Clarissa Pinkola Estés*

Each one of us has qualities or parts of ourselves that we have denied, repressed, or “split off” from consciousness. Pioneer psychologist Carl Jung called these exiled parts of self “shadow” because, pushed away from awareness, they remain hidden from us.

We deny these parts of self, often from childhood, because they were unacceptable to our parents, to society, or to our immature, narrow vision of ourselves. We all originally exiled parts of ourselves for good reasons; it was our way to adapt and survive, and also to create a positive self-image, to “be good.”

For some of us it was our anger or rage that was unwelcome, and so we rejected that part of ourself. For others it was our power, or

maybe our weakness. Either strength or vulnerability might have offended our caregivers when we were young; any quality at all might have been deemed unacceptable, and so was driven underground.

Individuals and families have their own standards for which qualities are allowed and which are denied, and every culture and subculture also has its own codes for what it rewards and what it punishes.

Each of us in our lifetime is faced with the task of, one way or another, bringing these repressed parts into consciousness and finding them an appropriate and enriching place in our lives. Until we do, they continue to drive our thinking and our behaviour, and have an enormous, though invisible, impact.

These rejected parts of ourselves not only cause suffering as they shape our lives from beneath conscious awareness, on the flip-side they also have valuable gifts to provide once we do the work of retrieving them. Thus the benefit of retrieval is twofold.

Reclaiming our lost parts, *integrating our shadow*... this is a process of becoming whole, of healing. In fact, some psychotherapeutic models put shadow retrieval or integration, in some form, at the center of the healing journey.

This work is difficult because to integrate the shadow, to retrieve the lost parts of self, means to face tremendous pain and confusion. We must face that which we long ago deemed unacceptable, bad, or even evil. But we must first *find* it. We must summon that which we banished, that which we fear most. And we must do it without

yet knowing how these parts of self will eventually be integrated. We have no place reserved for them in our home, and yet we must welcome them in.

We can not face our shadow directly because it is unconscious, and therefore invisible; otherwise it would not be our shadow. It must be viewed through a veil or intermediary. Shadow must be approached indirectly, through metaphor, myth, art, role-play, poetry, and other forms of suspended disbelief. Shadow retrieval and integration happens on the edge of consciousness, in the liminal spaces, in the places in between. Conscious Kink can provide these places.

## 2. MAKING A PLACE FOR SADISM AND MASOCHISM



*“Hatred and aggression — and carnivorous sexual intent — aren’t our ‘dark’ side. Our dark side is the side that denies its own existence.”*

*~ David Schnarch*

Two of the most commonly denied, most present, and most influential, though unconscious, aspects of self are in fact twin shadow archetypes: *the sadist and the masochist*.

We all have an inner sadist taking pleasure in the suffering of others, and also an inner masochist finding comfort in our own suffering.

BDSM can turn sadomasochism into an art and a practice, and provides, if we use it consciously, a structure for beginning to glimpse and reconcile our own denied or projected sadism and/or masochism.

Conscious Kink allows us a soundstage, a theatre for playing out a sadomasochistic drama, for bearing witness to our own sadistic or masochistic desires and tendencies, and potentially for finding them a home, an appropriate place in our psyche via our erotic lives.

Without a practice of this sort, we might continue unconsciously playing out our sadomasochistic patterns in our lives and relationships, denying our own complicity, and projecting our capacity for cruelty or martyrdom onto others, where we can judge it from a safe distance.

A conventional lover might protect their self-image of innocence, claiming, “Oh no, I never, ever punish my partner for not meeting my expectations. I take no joy in cruelty.” And then they give their partner the silent treatment, or with-hold affection, or explode with accusations.

By contrast, a practitioner of Conscious Kink, in a carefully negotiated BDSM session or “scene” with their partner says “Do as I say or there will be a consequence.” The sadism is revealed. It is summoned onto the stage where a couple can see it, work with it,

play with it, learn from it, find its erotic energy and harness it. Here we find potential for mutual pleasure, as well as shadow integration; transformation; alchemy.

The BDSM scene becomes a sacred space between the world of reality and the world of pretending. Sadomasochistic dynamics are first acknowledged as desire in the self, and then they are given a life through collaboration and negotiation. Within a BDSM scene, sadomasochistic dynamics become “play,” but they are also rooted in our deepest, most real, core selves.

The BDSM scene provides the “in-between” space necessary for retrieving the sadism and masochism we have denied in ourselves but projected onto others. The result, by any name, is healing.

We’ll explore sadomasochism in a practical BDSM context in the *Getting Started* section of the book.

### 3. EROTIC POWER EXCHANGE: DOMINANCE AND SUBMISSION



*“Everything in the world is about sex except sex. Sex is about power.”*  
~ Oscar Wilde

Power dynamics exist, mostly unconscious and unacknowledged, within all relationships. So much so that therapists often talk about the “power struggle” phase of a marriage or relationship as though it were inevitable.

Beneath the spoken agreements in any relationship, beneath the obvious labour divisions and the negotiated sharing of responsibilities, lurk shadowy power struggles, uneasy balancing acts, and resentment-laden asymmetries.

Consciously bringing power exchange dynamics into a relationship in an erotic or sexual form can add more than “spice” or excitement, it can shine a light on some of these hidden power struggles and imbalances.

Also illuminated is your own personal relationship to power -

Are you comfortable with power? Are you afraid of it?

Do you fight for power in your relationship? Do you crave it?

Do you share power well with others? Do you consider the responsibility of power to be a burden?

Are you trustworthy with power? Do you trust power in the hands of your partner? Do you abdicate your power and then resent its loss?

How about powerlessness? Do you fear loss of control?

Do you crave loss of control? Do you long for surrender?



Uncovering the hidden power dynamics in ourselves and in our relationship through a practice of Conscious Kink can have surprising and even disturbing outcomes.

Control issues may be revealed. Fear, cruelty, punishment, withholding... these are all normal dark-side aspects of power that may present themselves. They've been there all along, but now we see them in a new light.

Conscious Kinky Couples can collaboratively and consensually play with power dynamics, eroticizing them, finding pleasure in them, and perhaps, over time, glean some of the deeper meanings that power (and powerlessness or surrender) holds in their relationship and in their lives.

Conscious Kink and BDSM practitioners usually identify as either top, bottom, or switch. The terms dominant and submissive are often used interchangeably with the terms top and bottom. Tops (dominants) hold power, bottoms (submissives) surrender power, and switches, as the term implies, can go either way. The degree of power exchange, and the specific nuances, are carefully discussed and negotiated until full consent and understanding is reached.

You're not bound (pun intended) to any particular identity, and you're free to experiment with whatever sort of power exchange suits you and your partner.

For those of us who value equality and respect, bringing erotic power exchange into our relationship can present a dilemma. We might have an inner conflict between a desire for sexual

dominance or submission, and also a voice that says “this goes against what you believe.”

### Rachel and Caleb

Rachel is a woman of thirty, a meditation teacher, who is in a relationship with a man, Caleb, whom she describes as her “best friend and soul mate.” Rachel came to me because of a growing erotic desire that was troubling her. She wanted to be sexually dominated by Caleb. She had mentioned it to him a few times, always in small ways, to test the water. He would always find a way to dismiss it, usually turning it into a joke so that he could laugh it off, and she got the impression he was very uncomfortable with the idea.

Caleb is a sensitive and caring man, and a self-described feminist. He was raised by a single mom, and was taught to respect women. It became clear to Rachel that her desire was becoming a need, and if she was going to get this need met, she would have to confront Caleb with the issue. She wanted me to help her strategize.

I can relate to people like Caleb, and to their predicament. What’s interesting to note is that sensitive, caring men and women, if they’re willing to wrestle with paradox, are well suited to embody the sexually dominant role particularly skillfully.

Playing the dominant role in an erotic power exchange doesn’t require you to betray your values of respect and equality; it

requires you to *expand* on them. It requires you to grow, not shrink.

A person can have an extraordinary amount of care and respect for their partner and still consensually control, dominate, even humiliate or inflict pain on them within a negotiated power exchange arrangement. These people are so confident in their values, in their morality, that they can branch out, exploring their darker desires, knowing that they remain rooted in all that makes them good.

Rachel's story is common. Individuals continue to grow as individuals, even as they are in relationships. One of the ways that individuals grow is sexually, and that growth isn't always symmetrical between partners. Many clients come to me, individuals and couples, because of this asymmetrical growth. There is love, but something else is missing. For some people, like Rachel, that something is the feeling of being sexually taken, dominated, even used, by their partner.

To be clear - I've encountered many, many healthy, loving, considerate, sensitive, intelligent people who want to be sexually taken, dominated, used, humiliated, controlled, punished, hurt, or frightened by their partner. They might want to be slapped, flogged, blindfolded, restrained, tied up, fucked hard, and more.

Good people have desires to do "bad" things to each other (or have them done to them) sexually. If they do it consciously, with care and consent, it can be extremely satisfying, and can even help grow and heal a relationship and the people in it.

Many counsellors and therapists might question Rachel's motives. Why does she want to be sexually dominated by her partner? What kind of childhood trauma or attachment issue does she suffer from?

I happen to trust her desires and do not see them as a problem. I also trust that pursuing her desires in a spirit of curiosity, with a conscious intention to welcome growth and healing, will reveal the right psycho-emotional material at the right times. My suggestion to Rachel was that she practice "owning" her desires, and that she have some frank and difficult conversations with Caleb.

She confided to me that she really had no idea what to ask for. She knew that Caleb, if he was willing to indulge her, would need direction, or at least some ideas. I suggested that they start with something easy; perhaps he could instruct her to crawl slowly around the room while he notices his own experience, watching for any sign of his own enjoyment or turn-on.

It always works best if both people in a relationship are enjoying what they do together. That said, it can work, to a point, if one person is kind enough to indulge the other (this is sometimes called "service topping" in a BDSM context), but ideally both people are being nourished.

Rachel knew what she wanted to feel... surrender, being controlled, loss of self. Caleb might be willing to go along as an experiment, but there was no indication that he had a personal stake in this beyond making Rachel happy.

Rather than simply going through the motions for her benefit, I wanted to make sure Caleb had the opportunity to really examine

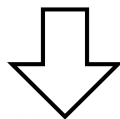
whatever pleasure the exchange might hold for him. By going slowly, with a simple Dominant/submissive activity like him telling Rachel how to crawl, Caleb might begin to see if power exchange held any intrinsic pleasure for him...

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