

# Power Exchange: What is it?

A popular primer on BDSM written in 1995, "Screw the Roses, Send Me the Thorns" by Philip Miller and Molly Devon, defines Power Exchange as the empowerment of the dominant by the submissive's surrender to his/her control. Power exchange is consensual and should be well negotiated. The depth of the power yielded by the submissive is equal to the level of responsibility assumed by the Dominant. Basically, it's the way D/s relationships of any type of work. A submissive surrenders power and a Dominant assumes power. Most vanilla relationships work on an equality in role system, where partners flow in and out of being in control depending on the situation or activity involved. This is also where a lot of "guy jobs" and "girl jobs" develop in a relationship.

A power exchange is more rigidly defined. Couples discuss and negotiate who has what role and what that role looks like to them. A submissive will tell the Dominant what they will and won't submit to and a Dominant has to agree to those terms to make it work. It's a consensual negotiation process and depending on the level of power exchange, could involve a little or a lot of control. Power exchange is also the basis of all BDSM play. One person agrees to submit to the activity and the other agrees to be in control.

Going back to the book, Screw the Roses, Philip and Molly break down Power Exchange into five levels and I'm going to cover each one in turn. Keep in mind that these levels are the way the authors were able to break up the differences in Power Exchange relationships and might not be the best way to describe them now.

## Levels of Power Exchange from Screw the Roses:

1: Conditional Compliance - The SM one-nighter, a limited exchange of power negotiated by a Dom and sub for a single scene or brief period of play, such as overnight, one day or one weekend.

2: Restricted ongoing acquiescence - An agreement, negotiated by a Dom and sub, to play casually for an extended period of time without serious emotional involvement. The two only have power exchange for play and do not interact outside of that, often called play partners in today's lingo.

3: Provisional submission - An ongoing relationship negotiated between a Dom and a sub characterized by power exchange and emotional involvement but lacking serious commitment. This level has evolved, in my opinion, to be the style of D/s relationship that I'd consider to be bedroom only. The couple may have a committed relationship, but the power exchange isn't an integrated part. They could agree to only express D/s when in the bedroom, or on weekends or when a babysitter can be found.

4: Covenant of Dominant and submission - A deeply committed symbiotic relationship between a dominant and submissive. Power Exchange relationships of this type have elements of D/s throughout their daily living and identify as Dominant and submissive outside the bedroom and often have rules, rituals or ways to interact within the relationship to express the power exchange to each other.

5: Absolute Ownership - Used to mean an ongoing d/s relationship often involving Total Power Exchange where the submissive has surrendered all decisions to the Dominant. This is often described as a Master and slave relationship.

So, in review, Power Exchange is a way to interact with your partner where your roles are defined, you've negotiated control where one submits and the other dominates for an agreed period of time and is the basis for all BDSM interactions.

<https://www.submissiveguide.com/fundamentals/videos/define-this-power-exchange>

lunaKM has been a full-time slave in an M/s relationship for over 10 years. She is the founder and editor of Submissive Guide.

Screw the Roses, Send Me the Thorns" by Philip Miller and Molly Devon <https://amzn.to/2KXFBgx>

# BDSM Basics: 5 Things About Power Exchange

BY KAYLA LORDS · PUBLISHED DECEMBER 16, 2019 · UPDATED DECEMBER 13, 2019

Power exchange is the big term we use for Dominance and submission, Master/slave, Caregiver/little, and even top and bottom. The definition is in the phrase: power and control are exchanged between partners with one person taking control and having the power, while the other partner gives up control.

It's easy to think that each specific dynamic (D/s, M/s, Cg/l, etc) are all completely different from each other. But ultimately, they're all power exchange relationships. And as such, all fall under certain common "rules" or best practices. Every dynamic is unique, but if it's a power exchange, these things remain true no matter what. ***(Prefer to watch and learn? Scroll to the end for the link to the video version of this post.)***

## *There is no single way.*

Hopefully this is already clear, but there is no single "correct" power exchange. Dominance and submission is not "better" than Master/slave. Playing as top and bottom isn't "inferior" to a D/s relationship. Whatever way works for you and your partner is the right way. And however, you configure your power exchange is the right way. All that matters is that both partners communicate their needs, listen to each other, find common ground, and only act with full, enthusiastic, and informed consent.

## *You choose your labels.*

Call yourself whatever you want: Sir, Ma'am, Lady, Duke, Duchess, Daddy, Mommy, Papi, Lord, King, Queen, baby girl, pet, kitten, pup, WHATEVER. **The labels** are yours to choose in your relationship. Regardless of the specific power exchange dynamic you choose what you call yourself can be anything that works for you. Plenty of Caregiver/little dynamics don't use terms like "Daddy" or "Mommy." Master/slave relationships don't always refer to each other as Master/Mistress or slave. The label doesn't define your power exchange — **you do.**

## *Sex is not required.*

Power exchange exists separately from sex. Can sex be integrated into your power exchange? Abso-fucking-lutely! Is it required? Abso-fucking-lutely NOT! Some of us can't imagine D/s or M/s without sex. Some of us can't imagine power exchange WITH sex. It's all about personal preference, and what you and your partner decide works for you.

## *It can be casual or serious.*

If I had a dollar for every time someone said, "It's not 'real' D/s unless you're in love" OR "It's not a real power exchange once you fall in love" I'd be a rich bitch, y'all. Power exchange can be EITHER. They can be both. Sometimes you begin as friends and end up lovers. Maybe you start as lovers and become casual play partners. Maybe all you want is a play partner you can trust when you're in the mood to play. And maybe you can only handle a power exchange in a committed relationship. It's ALL valid.

## *24/7 is not required.*

I'd also like a dollar for every "It's not real unless it's 24/7. Bedroom only doesn't count." AHHHHHHHHHHH! Nope, nope, triple nope. Power exchange is about giving up or receiving control and power. If that happens for five minutes once every six months, it's just as valid as the person who lives a micromanaged M/s dynamic and can't go to the bathroom without permission. Even 24/7 power exchange isn't always 24/7. Try telling your vanilla boss you can't go to that afternoon meeting without your Dominant's permission. That's not how real life works, and we all know it.

<https://lovingbdsm.net/2019/12/16/bdsm-basics-power-exchange/>