

## Finding a Kinky Partner – A Five Part Series

Tamar Kay

### Part 1 - Knowing yourself and your values

This article begins a discussion of how you might go about finding a kinky partner, now that you've decided you want one. Since this discussion will take longer than a single article will allow, this article starts a short series.

Please understand that this article, like all my articles, is a reflection of my experience and discussions with other people, and may or may not be useful to you. I suggest that you read this article--and all material about relationships--with a critical eye. Only you can decide what works for you.

Finding a kinky partner can be quite a challenge, since you may have already eliminated most people you're likely to run across as potentials. But it can be done.

The first thing to do is to become as clear as you can about who you are, and what you want. This is especially important when you're looking to match interests with a potential partner.

There are a number of ways that people describe their kinky interests. I'm going to offer a few of the standard ones and then one of my own. Like any set of attributes, these are simplifications and generalizations that at best only sketch your areas of interest, but this can be a good place to begin.

If you're just starting in the scene, you may not be able to come to clear conclusions all at once-- that's all right. Give yourself time to learn who you are in this arena.

#### *Charting your interests*

For the following four categories, I suggest you try rating yourself from 0-10, where 0 means "not at all interested," 10 means "yes, definitely, and a lot," and 5 means that you can take it or leave it, or that you're not sure. Feel free to give yourself a range of numbers.

Dominance and Submission, or "D/S": Power exchange, that is, having power over someone, or giving someone else power over you, usually in an erotic context.

Sadomasochism or "SM": Giving or receiving pain for some form of pleasure.

Sex: How often do you want it? Does your kinky activity need to include sex? Are you straight, gay, bi, or unsure? You may find your definitions vary depending on the activity and your partner. (Some people, for example, describe themselves as "SM-bi" even if they normally consider themselves straight or gay.)

Relationships: Do you want an exclusive relationship, or an open one? One partner or many? (The two previous questions are not the same. There are those who have fidelities relationships with more than one partner.)

***Tamar's "Need and Desire" Scale***

Your level of kinky "need and desire" can affect what you do and look for in a partner. I developed this scale to help people rate their interest level with regard to D/S and SM. I find it very useful when discussing partner matching issues and possibilities.

I divide intensity of "need and desire" into four categories. This is how I apply those categories to an interest in D/S and SM:

Category 0: No interest or enjoyment of D/S or SM. Also described as "vanilla."

Category 1: Enjoys D/S and/or SM activities as an addition to other sexual activities, as part of a repertoire. Could make do without such activities without feeling loss.

Category 2: Enjoys D/S and/or SM activities as a major component of sex and would be unhappy to be without these activities.

Category 3: Requires D/S and/or SM activities in order to be sexually fulfilled, such activities and/or perspectives being defining factors in their lives. These are often (but not always) those who will say they are at the "lifestyle" end of the spectrum.

You might ask yourself which category you best fit into. If you meet someone you're interested in, you may also want to ask them. Mismatched interest levels can lead to problems. For example, a category three is unlikely to feel fulfilled in a monogamous relationship with a category one.

Think about what's important to you, what you need and want, and what you can compromise on. The better you know yourself, the better luck you'll have finding someone to share your interests. Next month: now that I've got you thinking about you, let's talk about the person you're looking for.

## **Part 2 - Knowing whom you're looking for**

This is the second article in my series on finding a kinky partner. In my last article we focused on who you are. Next I'll talk about the person you might be looking for and how to interest them. The best way to make yourself interesting to others is to be interested in them.

Again, please keep in mind that this article is a reflection of my experience and may or may not be useful to you. I encourage you to take in any information about relationships with a critical eye. Only you can decide what works for you.

Last time I examined some ways to describe your own kinky interests, which can be useful when you're trying to find someone to match you. But who are you looking for?

Perhaps you've given it a lot of thought (after having read last month's article and, of course, SM101 cover-to-cover.) Now you have a pretty clear idea of what you're looking for. That's a fine start, but now try thinking more about that other person--not what you want from them, but what they might want from you. The sort of person you're looking for--what would they be looking for? What would that someone get from being with you?

Relationships work best when all parties get more out of being together than being apart, when they get their wants and needs met most of the time. In short, when the benefits outweigh the costs. The better you understand a potential partner's wants and needs, the better you'll be able to negotiate about and meet those needs. By putting yourself in that person's place, you may start to understand what they might want. Think about the issues from the other side. Ask yourself what a potential partner might be most concerned with.

For example, a successful business person might be concerned with discretion--will you be able to go out on dates and "pass" as vanilla in vanilla circles? A very attractive partner might be concerned with anything but physical appearance--they might need to feel wanted for who they are inside more than for their looks. And many women are concerned with the safety of a new partner. Can you address those issues?

Everyone wants something. See if you can figure out what it is. Those will be the keys to engaging in a successful relationship.

If you're a heterosexual man, you may be thinking that it's harder to find women, and that you're at a disadvantage. There's some truth to that, since there usually appear to be more men in the scene than women. But remember that you aren't competing with all other men, just the ones who are looking for the same things you are, which (remember last month's column?) might be very specific.

And be careful about getting caught in the "I can't find a partner because there aren't enough of them". That may be a convenient way to make yourself feel better about not finding what you want, but it is also a way of making the challenges someone else's problem. If you want a partner, these are your challenges, and you don't get any closer to meeting them by giving them away.

The more you know about your target group, the more likely you are to find someone in that group with whom to share a mutual attraction. Think about the needs and wants of your target group. What makes you special? What can you offer someone? What's unusual about you? Be as specific as you can. Make a list. Take some guesses. If you're really stuck, ask someone to help you. Once you have a list, try to look at it from the point of view of a potential partner. Imagine that you're your desired partner. How does the list look? What are you pleased to find there? What's missing?

Be careful on that last one; we are usually our own harshest judges. My goal here isn't to encourage you to list all your shortcomings (though you're free to do so) but to encourage you to try to see out of the eyes of an imaginary partner. Understanding someone else's needs goes a long way toward building a successful match.

After you've made your list and given it some thought, you might want to try looking around to see if anyone you already know looks different in light of your reflections. You never know. Next month: where should you look and how?

### **Part 3 - Being respectful and caring about others**

This is the third in my series of articles on finding a kinky partner. In this one I'll talk about where to look for a partner, and how. As always, please bear in mind that this article is the result of my own experience and might not be applicable to you. Please read all information about relationships with a critical eye. Only you can decide what works for you.

Last month I asked you to think in depth about the person you're looking for to get a better idea of what that person might be like and what you might offer them. This time I'll explore ways to meet that potential partner.

When you're searching for something, you should try to increase the odds of finding it. Sounds pretty simple, eh? So, when you're searching for a partner, seek ways to contact the broadest possible spectrum of compatible people.

In short, you should look everywhere.

#### ***Events***

Being physically present at an event increases the odds of coming across a potential partner. Meeting someone in the flesh is always the best way to screen potential partners because you get more information from them than you would, say, over the phone. If you decide to use this avenue, try to attend as many events as you can. RCDC and other groups put on regular events. Ask around. You may also want to join the NLA -- the National Leather Association, which now has local events and yearly conventions.

#### ***Personals Ads***

Placing and answering ads may also be a way of hooking up with like-minded individuals. Remember that not everyone who might be compatible with you is involved in the organized scene. Some people don't like crowds. If you're one of them, you may find this a better avenue than attending events.

Local ads make it easier to meet potential matches, whereas national ads let you search among a greater range of people. Much depends on the publication in which you place your ad.

If you have access to the Internet, you can place an ad for free on [alt.bondage.personals](http://alt.bondage.personals). Since access is both free and world-wide, not everyone posting there is serious, but many are.

Personals ads are effective for some people, less so for others. Keep in mind that while the odds may favor women looking for men, anyone can stand out with a good ad.

Should you lie, or maybe fudge the truth a little? Someone once told me, "everyone lies in personals ads." But it isn't true. If you want an honest partner, you have to offer the same. It's a bad idea to misrepresent yourself in a community whose watch phrase is "safe, sane, and consensual." Honesty builds trust.

### ***Ask Your Friends***

You can ask the people you know in the community for help in your search. Most people in the community are pleased to help. Some are closet matchmakers who would be only too happy to have an invitation to be involved with your search. And if someone in the community recommends a potential partner to you, that personal reference is an added safety bonus.

But never take anyone else's word on the safety of an unknown partner. You have to judge for yourself, which brings us to...

### ***Safety***

I recommend reading the chapter, "Finding Partners," in Jay Wiseman's SM101. He covers a good number of safety tips. If you are a woman, be especially careful: don't give out your home phone or address to an unknown contact and don't meet in private unless a trusted friend knows where you are and will check on you.

Safety first! People do get hurt, and you don't want to be one of them. I can't begin to cover good safety practice here, so I again recommend picking up a good reference. Ask around. (SM101 is available at Spartacus or by mail through JT Toys, 800-755-8697.) [Editor's Note: JT Toys is now JT's Stockroom] Don't compromise on your safety. Safety is no joke when you're letting someone you don't know tie you up. Be safe starting with the first time. You may not get a second chance.

### ***Getting The Word Out***

Try writing a personals ad for yourself. Start out writing whatever comes to you, and edit later. You may want to scale it down for a newspaper. Ask friends to review it for you. There's nothing wrong with a second set of eyes, no matter how practiced you are. (I have my articles reviewed before I send them to RCDC -- Thanks, Simon!)

### ***Approaching Someone in Person***

People in the scene are rarely offended when approached directly, provided you are direct, don't apply pressure, and gracefully take "no" for an answer. If there's someone you're interested in, then consider approaching them directly. It's not that different from other social situations -- simply walk up and politely start up a conversation.

***Some Do's and Don'ts***

Do be friendly and try to show your best qualities (with your clothes on, please, unless it's that kind of party.) Do treat everyone with respect and courtesy. Do be honest about what you want and know.

Don't throw yourself at someone's feet, or start ordering them around. Such activities must be negotiated ahead of time. Behavior like that is considered rude and immature.

Do get out there and start looking.

Nervous? You're in good company. But the best thing you can do is start practicing. Introduce yourself to someone you're interested in, or answer a voice mail ad. Give it a try.

## **Part 4 - Having fun and sharing fun**

This is the fourth article in my series on finding a kinky partner. In this one I'll talk about four important aspects of finding and developing a relationship: patience, persistence, seduction, and compromise

### ***Patience***

You can't rush good wine, chocolate chip cookies, or great relationships. And even when you've got someone in your sights, respect and trust--essential components of any relationship, especially relationships based on power exchange--have to be allowed to develop over time.

If you're sure you've found the partner of your dreams, yet find they're sometimes hesitant or ambivalent, don't panic. It takes time to relax into each other. Getting to know someone is a lot like learning a language -- you have to practice and have time to absorb the subtleties. Hang out. Talk a lot. Play.

Sceneing is a lot like high-risk sports. Do you ski? Skydive? Race cars? It may be that if you invite your new interest to go white water rafting, they'll be strapping on a life jacket before you finished talking. But then again, maybe not. SM and d/s can be extreme forms of human interaction and not everyone is equally ready to jump in and start the ride. Sometimes patience is the answer.

Even if your object of affection is enthusiastic, there may be moments that make one or both of you hesitate. Be patient with your partner and yourself. There will always be time later, after you've learned each other better. In the beginning, take as much time as you need. A strong, lasting relationship is built gradually on solid foundations.

### ***Persistence***

If you've found someone, then you know that persistence pays off. If you haven't, you may instead feel discouraged. Looking for someone can be frustrating, especially if your erotic desires limit the playing field, as they do for many of us. (Remember Article One and categories of interest level.)

While many people report that they find partners when they least expect them, that doesn't mean they weren't looking when they hit pay dirt. Keep your eyes open. Search in whatever way suits you best (some I discussed in Article Three), but most important, keep that window of opportunity open as long as possible -- the ideal partner may be out there looking for you, but if you stop looking, they may miss you.

If you need to take a break, then do. My articles tend to focus on a scene-oriented view of issues, but there are other things in life besides SM and d/s. If you get tired of the search, it may be time to focus on other things that matter to you. And who knows what you'll find? Remember that kinky people are everywhere. Be open to opportunity, wherever it may arise.

Once you've found someone, persistence is still important. Some relationships take a lot of work, some take much less. Determine what level of attention your relationship needs, and then figure out how to provide it. Like plants, relationships need different amounts and types of nourishment.

### ***Seduction***

Seduction takes many forms. Everyone has a different approach. There are, however, a few basic principles.

Look good. It can be discouraging to search and search and still not find. Ironically, the more desperate and hungry you act, the less likely someone is to be attracted to you. The best way to seduce someone is to start by being seductive to yourself.

The key to looking good to others is to look good to yourself. Look in the mirror. Talk to yourself about what you see. Get comfortable with how you look and move and sound. Do what you can to become happier with yourself.

There are no objective measures here--however you look, move, or act, when you are comfortable with yourself, you'll be at your most attractive to others.

Listen well. When someone cares about what you say, you notice them. Why? Because people want to be cared about and want to be heard. Listen well to someone and you can make them feel, if only for a moment, that they're the most important person in the world. There is little as compelling as that.

The most important thing to be able to hear is "no." People may use other words, but you have to listen for the real meaning. If you're uncertain, err on the side of caution. You might be reluctant to hear "no", but that very reluctance can work against you--how you react to such communications is vital. If you treat someone's "no" with respect and understanding, you might find the "no" changing--but don't count on it. Do listen.

Give the best gift. The most unique gift you can give someone is yourself, your respect, your time. Learn to be as present as you can for each moment you are with someone you care about. Give of yourself, with integrity, as completely as you can.

### ***Compromise***

In any relationship, whether one is the top or bottom, there has to be give and take to make the partners fit. When the first snag comes along--and it will--remember that even in ideal relationships people have to change to meet each other.

The food of a relationship is the fun stuff, the stuff that makes you want to be close. Ideally, you'll both be so well fed on each other that when you have to work hard, the relationship will easily seem worth the effort. Feed your relationship the best food--the fun stuff--as much as you can.

In SM- and D/s- based relationships, we often use the word "negotiation" instead of "compromise." You may have already negotiated the basics of your relationship, but if the relationship has changed, those negotiations may be out of date. There's nothing wrong with reevaluation. Talk about what works as well as what doesn't. If you're the dominant, you can make it easier for your submissive to bring up problems by encouraging communication. Patience, persistence, seduction, and compromise. And fun.

## **Part 5 - Good communication**

This is the fifth and final article in my series on finding a kinky partner. There's no way to cover all the aspects of this subject in the space I've had--even if I knew what they were. Instead I've tried to examine some of the basics that I consider most important. I've focused specifically on kinky relationships, but many of the points I've covered apply as well to any relationship: knowing yourself and your values (article 1), knowing whom you're looking for (article 2), being respectful and caring about others (article 3), having fun and sharing fun (article 4), and good communication (this article) are all important aspects of any successful relationship.

But please remember that this series is only a reflection of my personal opinions and experience. I recommend that you consider information about relationships with a critical eye. Only you can decide what works for you.

So perhaps you've found that special someone, but things aren't working out quite the way you want them to. What now? If the relationship turns messy, here are some questions you may want to ask yourself.

### ***What are the problems?***

Do you know? If not you might try writing about them. Often putting issues into writing can make them clearer, and can also give you a chance to review them later. If you're stuck, try making a list of incidents, how you felt about them, and what you wish had happened instead.

If you can't agree with your partner about the nature of the problems, perhaps you both could benefit from writing about them. This can be especially useful when tempers are short.

### ***Are you fighting?***

Can you talk about the issues without fighting? If you can't, then that's another problem. It's important to try to communicate clearly, to fight, when you must, as "cleanly" as possible. Be careful about assigning blame when trying to sort out the issues. It's very hard not to feel and act defensive when you feel attacked, so do whatever you can to make sure your partner doesn't feel attacked. For example, saying, "When you said that, I felt bad..." is less hostile than saying, "You made me feel bad." Try to keep blame out of the picture, and try to state your feelings non-judgmentally.

### ***Are the problems D/s- or SM-based?***

If the problems are rooted in power exchange, then you may be able to deal with them by renegotiating your power-exchange agreement. Remember that in order for power exchange to work, both partners have to feel they have power to begin with. After all, you can't give anything away unless you have it to start with, and you can't take something that someone isn't fully giving. Don't be afraid of renegotiation--you may find that your new arrangement suits you better, or even that it doesn't look very different from the old one. Sometimes a willingness to reevaluate is all that's needed.

***Can you talk about the problems?***

One of the differences between a vanilla relationship and one based on power exchange is that there are times when it's reasonable for one partner (often the top) to not want to talk about the problem with the other because it might damage the power exchange. Even then, that partner should talk with someone, preferably someone who has had experience with the issues involved--another top, for example. This is a good time to make use of the community. If you can't talk to your partner, for whatever reason, find someone you can talk to.

***Can you ask for help?***

It's common in our culture to keep our relationship problems private because admitting we need help is often viewed as weakness. But we depend on other people all the time, and helping each other is one of the greatest privileges of friendship. Ask for help when you need it.

Kinky relationships can be especially complicated, and some of the issues can't be taken to a counselor. (There are some scene-friendly counselors, though. Ask around.) People in the scene are usually quite willing to talk with you about your experiences and offer opinions. But everyone is different--if what you hear doesn't make sense to you, continue asking. Get different viewpoints. Trust your intuitions.

***Are you still having fun?***

Are the problems in your relationship preventing you from having good times together? If so, then you may be starving the relationship. A balance of fun times to hard times is necessary in order for you both to continue working and expending energy. It's not uncommon for two people dealing with hard problems simply to become exhausted. If the problems detract from your ability to "feed" the relationship, then you need either to solve them before the relationship starves, or to find new ways to feed the relationship so that you don't run out of energy.

***Are you listening?***

It's hard to listen when someone you care about is saying things you don't want to hear. But it's essential. Rather than blowing up, try to take a "time out." Even five minutes apart can help both people cool down. If neither is listening, you may find that it helps to take turns. Use a stopwatch.

Listening is a powerful tool. If you can say to your partner, "Why don't you talk and I'll listen," you may find it possible to transform a fight into a good exchange.

***Do you like your partner?***

If there is a feeling of good will between you and your partner, then you have the most important tool of all. If that starts to break down, try to get it back.

Don't forget to tell your partner, in all the ways you can, that you value and desire them. That is, after all, the essence of any good relationship.

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