

“Interviewing a Prospective D/s - BDSM Partner”

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Over the past few years, as i have explored and then jumped into this lifestyle, one of the recurring questions i've heard is... “How do you find a good Dominant?” There are several articles on the Net suggesting places to look... local D/s-BDSM groups, introductions from friends, online, personals, etc. What i haven't run across yet is ... what questions should i ask a prospective Dominant once I've found one of interest? Hence, this essay.

By way of introduction, let me say that i have been a professional marketing researcher for over 10 years. i have taught literally hundreds of interviewers the best way to ask questions to elicit information. Those questioning techniques are the ones included in this article.

Some may take offense at the idea that someone is interviewing a prospective partner. It may sound cold and calculating. i guess, imho, the task of finding a suitable partner should be taken as least as seriously as finding out whether someone is qualified to stand behind a stainless steel counter and ask “Do you want fries with that?”

i had originally entitled this essay “Interviewing a Prospective Dominant.” But after thinking of the goal of an interview, and thinking of the kinds of questions to be included in such an interview, there is no reason why the same questions couldn't be asked of either a Dominant or a submissive.

Now i know that this essay could be fraught with those politically correct “he/she” “Top/Dominant/Master/Mistress/bottom/submissive/charge/slave” words. Because this is being written for a website aimed at primarily heterosexual novice submissives, i will err toward the Dominant/He—submissive/she terminology. Please “sub”stitute the words that make you feel most comfortable.

These are just general guidelines of the types of questions to ask a prospective partner. Some of the questions may be of no interest to you, and you can scratch those from the list. You will undoubtedly have other information that you will wish to gather, and you'll want to add questions to discover that. For example, if you are evaluating someone for a future playsession, you may or may not wish to go into the in-depth questions that are presented here. On the other hand, if you are evaluating a potential life mate, these questions could be just a start of a lifetime of conversation.

Keep in mind that during the information-gathering stage, through negotiations and up to the moment that submission and acceptance occurs, you are speaking as equals. Neither individual should feel reluctant to ask or answer questions “in order to form a more perfect Union.”

General Suggestions

The most revealing answers will come from “open-ended” questions. Avoid questions that can be answered “yes” or “no”, unless you have a follow-up question that gives the individual a chance to explain the answer.

You will probably not want to sit across a desk or restaurant table with a list of questions, taking notes during your conversation. It might be **just** a tad intimidating. Inquisitiveness is a good thing—inquisition is not. i give you a couple of suggestions here.

1. Suggest a game of “one-on-one truth or dare,” in which you set the stage for questions to be exchanged between you. If this is done online, you can log the conversation to be reviewed later. You might want to suggest that you keep the game at “truth” questions, with no dares, until you know each other better. It’s all about what is most comfortable to you. Jay Wiseman has some suggestions for playing “kinky truth or dare” here: Jay’s Truth or Dare rules
2. You can simply ask your prospective partner if you could ask a few questions to get to know him better. Or, if he starts asking questions, you should always feel comfortable asking him questions in return.
3. Weave these questions into general conversation when the opportunity presents itself. You will be seen as a “good conversationalist,” especially when you keep the other person talking about himself or herself.
4. If you are corresponding in email, you may want to suggest a “question of the day.” i have had occasion where this worked particularly well.... the rule that we had was, if i asked a question, he would answer it, but then i had to give him **my** answer to the same question.

This raises another suggestion. Before you ask these questions, think about the types of answers you would give to them if you were answering them, AND what kinds of answers you hope to hear from your partner. If you approach this information-gathering exercise with objectivity, you are more likely to find someone with whom you are compatible.

Probing and Clarifying Responses

As a good friend reminded me (thanks Mary!), follow-up questions usually yield more information than the original answer. “Probe” questions are used to get to full lists of things; “clarifying” questions are used to get more detail or explanations about things.

Use the time-tested research technique of asking “what else” to get the person to continue talking. “What else did you like to do as a kid?” “What else do you see yourself doing in five years?” In face-to-face conversations, you can “probe” or “clarify” using body language. A quizzical look.. a “hmmmmmm...not sure i understand”... even your silence, accompanied by a nod, will encourage someone to keep talking.

If you hear something in an answer that intrigues you, or concerns you, or surprises you, ask more about it. To get the details, you can use follow-up questions, referring to the specific point you wish to clarify, such as:

1. You mentioned _____. That’s really interesting to me. Can you tell me more about that?
2. I’m not sure i understand _____, can you give me an example of that?
3. Hmmmm fascinating... why do you feel _____ was important?
4. That’s just the kind of answer i was hoping to hear... tell me more, please!

By the way, i probably learn as much about a person by what they **don’t** tell me as what they do. How long do they take to answer a question? Do they evade it, or redirect it, or suddenly have to take a phone call? Avoidance of a question is a red flag for me. In a person-to-person conversation, watch body language... shifting of the eyes, crossing the arms in front of the body, turning away from you are all indications of someone being ill at ease with the question.

Listen, Listen, LISTEN!

i'm saving the most important aspect of this communication lesson for the last of this section. Regardless of how insightful the question is, or how complete the answer, it is for naught if you don't LISTEN. Ask the question, listen for what is said and what is not said, ask follow up questions and really concentrate on what is being communicated to you. Don't be thinking of the next question, or a comment you want to make. LISTEN. Look into their eyes if you are face to face. Study the expression on their face, and how they position their body. If you are on the phone, you may want to make quick notes of comments that you wish to probe or clarify later.

Now, on to the questions themselves:

Character Questions

1. Please tell me a story of your childhood that helps me better understand the person you are today. This is my all-time favorite, no-fail question. Be prepared for humor, pathos, and even secret revelations of past embarrassments and triumphs that they haven't thought of in years.
2. What do you feel is your greatest failure thus far, and what did you learn from it? This one could reveal financial difficulties, or relationship problems, career burps, or other life bumps in the road. Beware the person who will admit to no failures. Either they are not being honest with you, or masters of deceiving themselves.
3. The mate to the preceding question, And what do you feel is your greatest success? Listen to the answers here, and in #2 above. If they are career oriented and you want a homebody, there may be incompatibility.
4. Who has been the most influential person in your life, up till now, and why? If he says its his mother, you **might** want to find out, subtly, if he's still living with her. If it's the shop teacher that taught him how to build sturdy equipment, or the Boy Scout troop leader who taught him knots, you may well be on the right track!
5. What do you feel are your strengths, and what do you feel you would like to change or improve? Does he struggle with this answer? Or can he give you lists quickly, off the top of his head? This question is designed to evaluate how well he knows himself, and how comfortable he is sharing his downside, as well as his upside. Are the responses about physical characteristics, or personal traits?
6. How would you describe your personal values and beliefs? "Greed is good" tells you one thing. "The Golden Rule" tells you something else entirely.
7. If you could break one law, and **know** that you could get by with it and not be prosecuted, what would it be? Why? Violent crimes (rape, murder, etc.) would be red flags for me.
8. What are your life dreams and ambitions? How do the dreams and ambitions you have now compare to the ones you had 10-20-30 years ago? What do they want to do with their life? What have they accomplished thus far, of the goals they had set for themselves in early adulthood?
9. If i were to have lunch with the person with whom you were involved most recently, what would i know of you by the time we ordered dessert? This one gives you insight as to how relationships end, level of honesty, and whether you're apt to encounter any "baggage" from that last relationship.

10. What question are you dreading that i will ask? What are they hiding? What do they wish you not to know? What part of their personality would they prefer to closet? Whether you actually **ask** them this question is up to you. Personally, i couldn't stand not asking <chuckle>.
11. What question do you hope i will ask you? This gives the person the opportunity to tell you something they consider to be very important about them. Judge for yourself the worthiness of what they feel is important. i would definitely ask them to give you the answer to this one.

“Life” Questions

I'm skipping the standard questions that everyone customarily asks... Career choice, what do you look like (if a non-personal communication), pets, yadda yadda. Don't forget to ask those, as well.

1. I'd like to get more of a feel for you. What does your home look like? (Follow-up question) Is it a house, apartment, condo, or what? (If you are communicating online or on the phone) Describe the room you are in right now or Describe your favorite room of the house. This may yield clues to financial stability, whether his ex moved out and took all the furniture, if he lives in a pigsty, if he's anal-retentive about cleanliness...even if he's living in a spare room of his office. Don't laugh..it's happened to me!
2. Would you tell me a bit about the past relationships in your life? Listen for **how** the past involvements are described, as a whole. Are there any recurring themes here? Do they speak ill of EVERY past involvement? Do they remain friends with their ex's? Are they long term or a string of short term relationships? Ask followup questions and really probe and clarify this question. In this one, the past does tend to predict the future.
3. Why are you looking for a partner now? What is your current relationship status? In the past, i've used such probes as: “So... are there any crazy ex's in your life who are likely to serve me rabbit stew?” This is also a good time to ask about children, marital status, whether the person has any other submissives, if there's a messy divorce looming, etc. If he's married, does his spouse know of his D/s-BDSM interest? Does she share it, or is she vanilla? You will need to decide for yourself how important this issue is for you.
4. Do you face any health issues? (If yes).. What are they? Are there any physical limitations that might affect interactions between us? For example, a submissive friend of mine was speaking with a Dominant who, she found out later, was suffering the early stages of Alzheimers. People i have been with have admitted, afterward, of having suffered heart attacks. Good follow-up questions here are about smoking, alcohol intake, and use of recreational or prescription drugs.
5. This raises the “safer sex” question. i've found it easier to bring up the subject myself by saying “i am tested every 6 months for all STDs and HIV, and my most recent test was _____. How about you? Are you fluid-bound with anyone?” Make plans to exchange test results, or pledge to be tested before getting together, etc.
6. What do you like to do for leisure activities? Look for common interests. If you're a movie/reading/music couch potato, you may want to shy away from Master Crocodile Dundee.

7. How do you envision your life 5 years from now? 10 years? How will it differ, or be similar, to the life you are living today? Look for realistic life goals. See if they mesh with yours.
8. What kind of car do you drive, and why did you buy that one? Men tend to choose cars that reflect themselves or their life situation. If they drive a station wagon or minivan, that tells me “family”. If they drive a Volvo, I tend to think “reliable and down-to-earth.” Porsche tells me... “vroooooom and exhibitionist.”
9. Describe two typical days for you... one of your work days, and one of your days off. This will tell you the level of responsibility he has at work, the kinds of stresses that he experiences, how involved he is in his job. It will also tell you the ways he unwinds.
10. What did you study in school? What were your favorite courses? Did you have any teachers who influenced you more than others? If they went to college or technical school, why did they choose the major or subject they did? Do they have any plans to continue their education?
11. What are your pet peeves? What really ticks you off? And how do you react when you're angry? This will give you a list of things to avoid, and also give an indication of their level of self-control over their anger.

“Lifestyle” Questions

There are several sites on the Net that include an extensive list of scene elements. BDSM Partner Checklist is the best organized and easy to use that I have found on the Web. If there are activities that either of you wish to do that are NOT on this list, don't forget to add them before completing the checklist.

For a pretty good indication of compatibility between you, I would suggest that you both complete this list, independently, and compare your answers. Talk about each answer. Get specifics about experience. “How many times do you think you've used a flog?” “Can you give me a sense of how hard you hit with a crop?” “I don't know what _____ is. Can you explain it to me?” As you're going through the list, ask which elements are “specialties of the house”...things he prefers to do, things he LOVES to do. This conversation alone could take hours—even days—and, if fully probed and clarified, will naturally lead to a discussion of limits, past experience, wants and desires.

If you are negotiating a one-time or casual interaction, at a minimum, you review this list and go through a discussion of “Must have / Don't want to try / Dying to try / NO WAY” of the scene elements that could be included.

If you are considering a long-term relationship, though, my recommendation is to wait a long time before dragging out the list. The discussion of specific elements and activities seems to intensify the feelings between the two, as the hormones get **really** involved at this stage. You want to stay objective as long as possible. Ask these kinds of questions first:

1. What are you looking for? This is a wide-open question, and it's intended to be probed, clarified, examined, re-asked and closely evaluated. Do they mention relationship?... the “F” word?... 24/7?... play partner?... afternoon delight?... soulmate?...an occasional play scene? How does the answer jibe with what you want?

2. What is your personal philosophy of (Dominance/submission)? Do you describe yourself as a Top, or Dominant, or Master-Mistress, and what do you feel is the difference among these? Why do you feel you are _____ as opposed to something else? Do these definitions match yours? There are so many different flavors in this lifestyle... D/s (dominance and submission)... BD (bondage and discipline)... SM (sadism and masochism)... varying intensities and levels of sensuality... even combinations of DS, BD, and SM... relationships with sexual contact, or without... It's very important to get this clarified right up front. i call it, making sure the kinks match.
3. Have you ever been a Dominant/submissive/Top/bottom/Master-Mistress/slave? (whatever is the opposite of whatever the person is today.) (If yes) Tell me more about that? What did you learn from that experience that you feel makes you a better (whatever the person is today.)? (If no) Why haven't you? Would you ever like to? Why or why not?
4. What is the most important advice you give to newcomers, both to Dominants and submissives, who are exploring D/s-BDSM? This will give you some insight as to how much they have counseled newcomers, as well as give you an idea of their perspective about what is important to them.
5. What is the funniest thing that has ever happened to you during a scene? Asking this question will be an indication of the person's sense of humor, will get some specifics on the types of things that could come up.
6. How long have you been actively (Dominant/submissive) and how did you discover it? Watch out for the "i have been in the scene for 25 years" kind of answer, especially if the person is only 40 years old. Do the math. Probe to find out if that is continuous experience, or if there are lengthy retreats to the vanilla world.
7. Let's talk a bit about scenes. What's the most intense scene you've done? What's a "typical" scene for you? Has anyone ever gotten injured during a scene you were involved in? Describe a scene that you have always wanted to do, but haven't yet. What techniques or tools do you wish to learn? This will get to some discussion of likes and dislikes, as well as fantasies, and will also tell you if this prospective partner realizes that they "don't know it all."
8. How do you feel about polyamory? (having multiple submissives seems to be the most frequent model of polyamory) Is this something you would wish to experience? Have you had polyamorous relationships in the past? Talk this one through a LOT. This one's a biggie! And make sure **you** know how you would answer it for yourself, because it's almost guaranteed to be asked of you in return.
9. What is your sexual orientation? If there is any interest in same-sex interactions, either as a participant or observer? (if you are speaking to someone who is heterosexual)? If either party is interested in partaking of a wider sexual smorgasbord, how will those interests and desires be met within the relationship? Will you be **expected** to interact with others of the same sex?
10. What does a collar signify for you? How many times have you (given/received) a collar? There are those who feel a collar is tantamount to the lifetime commitment of a wedding ring; others think of it as a class ring, wrapped in mohair, to be removed and discarded on a whim.

11. If this is a relationship that will be conducted at a distance, find out What methods and techniques will you use to minimize the distance, to keep the connection strong between us? How often will we meet in person? Who will pay for travel expenses and long distance charges? It's better to get this discussion out of the way, because if it is a long-distance relationship, the issue is bound to come up.
12. How much control will be exerted within the relationship? Is it more a micromanagement style? (selecting clothes for the other, requiring constant contact, keeping daily time logs, etc.) A minimum amount of control? Will it be exerted at all times, or only when you are together, face-to-face? Are you comfortable with that?
13. What are your thoughts on punishment? What techniques does this person use to influence changes in unwanted behavior? Are they positive, reinforcing those things that please? Or are they punitive?
14. What will you expect of me? This question gets to "the rules" and design of the relationship. Can you accept these rules? What are his expectations in terms of "service" that you will provide? How will he expect you to dress? How will you be expected to behave in public? Does he expect you to scene in public, or will all of your interactions be private? Will humiliation be an aspect of the relationship? If so, what does he define as humiliation? Will you be expected to interact with others (either male or female) of his choosing? Will you be allowed to interact with others if you so choose?
15. If sex will be an element of the relationship, how do you define "sex"? This seems to be a pretty basic question, but you'll be surprised at the variety of answers to this one. Some have said, "the Clinton definition (penetration)"... others feel its anything beyond kissing... yet others have said, its anything that brings erotic pleasure. There's a lot of room for misunderstanding if you don't get it clear at the outset.
16. The last point is difficult, particularly for novices. If you are truly interested in a prospective partner, you will want to get the names of others who know this person **real time**, and better yet, those who have interacted with him or her. You might say, "It is my practice to ask for references before i meet/play with/scene with someone. Could you give me a couple of names and phone numbers?" If you both live in the same community, you could say, "I'm curious whether we might know some mutual people. Who do you know in the scene here?" "Do you belong to any of the local D/s-BDSM organizations?" If they tell you they frequent a particular chat room, you might visit that room and discretely ask about them. The community network is very active...use it to your benefit.

For this question especially, avoidance or dodging is a **major** red flag for me. i have heard some say, "I never reveal the names of my past encounters." That's well and good. Ask your prospective to get in touch with the reference, and ask him to give them YOUR name and get in touch with you.

In Closing

Thank you for taking the time to review this material. i'm sure that you have thought of questions of your own that have worked for you in the past, or will work for you in the future. You might want to drop a line (clairmatin@aol.com) to suggest questions of your own that would be included in updates to this site.

And i wish you much luck in your search and your exploration of this lifestyle! i truly hope these suggestions help you find someone qualified to stand behind a wood and leather spanking bench and ask "Do you want clamps with that?"

Be safe!

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