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 BY DAN SAVAGE
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 Seeking Answers Concerning Kink

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One shows up, SACK.
 "Eighty percent of success is just showing up," someone or other once said. The adage applies to romantic/sexual success as well as professional success, SACK, but showing up easily accounts for 90 percent of success in the BDSM/leather/fetish scene. (Being a decent human being accounts for the other 110 percent*.) Because if you aren't showing up in kink spaces—online or IRL—your fellow kinksters won't be able to find or bind you. But you don't have to take my word for it...

"The leather scene is a diverse place with tons of outlets and avenues, depending on how you navigate your life and learn," said Amp from Watts the Safeword (wattsthesafeword.com), a kink and sex-ed website and YouTube channel. "When I was first getting started, I found a local leather contingent that held monthly bar nights and discussion groups that taught classes for kinksters at any level. It provided an easy way into the community, and it helped me meet new people, make new friends, and find trustworthy play partners. If you're a tad shy and work better online, these contingents have Facebook groups or FetLife pages you can join. And YouTube has a channel for everyone in the kink spectrum from gay to straight to trans to nonbinary and beyond!"

"Recon.com is a great option for gay men," said Metal from the gay male bondage website MetalbondNYC.com. "It's a site where you can create a profile, window-shop for a play buddy, and 'check his references.' Even better, if you can, go to a public event like IML, MAL, or CLAW, or to a play party like the New York Bondage Club, where you can participate in a monitored space with other people around, or just watch the action. Don't forget the motto 'safe, sane, and consensual,' and be sure to have a safe word! And if you do want to explore bondage, take precautions. Never get tied up in your own home by someone you don't know. If you go to his or her place, always tell a trusted friend where you are going. And when hooking up online, never use Craigslist."

"Be cautious," said Ruff of Ruff's Stuff blog. "There are people out there who view 'kink newbies' as prey. Anytime anyone—top or bottom—wants to rush into a power-exchange scene, that's a red flag. Always get to know a person first. A good-quality connection with any potential playmate is achieved only through communication. If they are not interested in doing the legwork, they're not the right person for you."

Follow Metal on Twitter @MetalbondNYC, follow Amp @Pup_Amp, and follow Ruff @RuffsStuffBlog.

I'm a 28-year-old bi-curious female, and I ended a three-year straight LTR a month ago. It's been tough—my ex is a great guy, and causing him pain has been a loss on top of my own loss, but I know I did the right thing. Among other things, our sex life was bland and we had infrequent sex at best. Now I want to experiment, explore nonmonogamy, and have crazy and fulfilling sex with whoever tickles my fancy. I met a new guy two weeks ago, and the sex is incredible. We also immediately clicked and became friends. The problem? I suspect he wants a romantic relationship. He says he's open to my terms—open/fuck-buddy situation—but things have quickly become relationship-ish. I like him, but I can't realistically picture us being a good LTR match. I'm hoping we can figure out something in between—something like a sexual friendship where we enjoy and support each other and experiment together without tying ourselves down—but I have found very little evidence of such undefined relationships working without someone getting hurt. I am sick of hurting people! Any advice?

Hoping Open Peaceful Experiences Feel Unlike Loss

If "someone might get hurt" is the standard you're going to apply to all future relationships—if it's a deal breaker—then you shouldn't date or fuck anyone else ever again, HOPEFUL, because there's always a chance someone is going to get hurt. The fact that hurt is always a possibility is no excuse for hurting others needlessly or maliciously; we should be thoughtful and conscientious about other people's feelings. We should also remember that no one is clairvoyant and that someone can hurt us without intending to. But there's no intimate human connection, sexual or otherwise, that doesn't leave us open to hurting or being hurt.

So fuck this guy, HOPEFUL, on your own terms—but don't be too quick to dismiss the possibility of an LTR. Great sex and a good friendship make up a solid foundation. You're aware that nonmonogamous relationships are an option—and couples can explore nonmonogamy together. If you can have this guy and have your sexual adventures, too—this could be the start of something big.

I'm a mid-20s, above-average-looking gay dude into spanking guys. The weird thing is, the only guys I can find to spank are straight. It's not that they're closeted—most of them go on to have girlfriends, and that's when we stop—and they make it clear they don't want anything sexual to happen. No complaints on my end! But why don't they want a woman spanking them?

Seriously Perplexed And Needing Knowledge

How do you know their new girlfriends don't start spanking them when you stop? And how do you know they aren't closing their eyes and imagining that you're a woman when you're spanking them? And how do you know they're not bi—at least where spankings are concerned? (Also: There are tons of gay guys out there into spanking, SPANK. So if you aren't finding any, I can only conclude that you aren't looking.)

I'm wondering about the application of the term "bear" to a straight man, such as myself. I'm a bigger guy with a lot of body hair and a beard. I love that in the gay community there is a cute term for guys like me reflecting body positivity. For us straight dudes, however, being big and hairy means getting thought of as an ape—big, dumb, smelly oafs. While I can be dumb, smelly, and oafish at times (like anyone), I'd also like to have a way to describe myself that is masculine yet attractive. Bear is a great term, but I'm concerned about being insensitive in appropriating it. I haven't asked my gay/bear friends about it (though they've referred to me as a bear on occasion) because I'm afraid I won't get a straight answer (no pun intended). Would it be okay for me to refer to myself as a bear or, as a highly privileged straight cis male, do I need to accept the fact that I can't have everything and maybe leave something alone for fucking once?

Hetero Ape Inquiring Respectfully, Yup

"If you want to be a bear, BE A BEAR!" said Brendan Mack, an organizing member of XL Bears (xl-bears.org), a social group for bears and their admirers. "DO YOU! There isn't anything appropriative about a straight guy using the term 'bear' to describe himself—it's a body type, it's a lifestyle, and it's celebrating yourself. Gay, straight, hairy, smooth, fat, muscled—bear is a state of mind. It's body acceptance. It's acceptance of who you are. So if you want to be a bear, WELCOME TO THE WOODS!"

Matt Bee, the promoter behind Bearracuda Worldwide (bearracuda.com), seconded Mack. "The term 'bear,' like any other animal descriptor, is a pretty playful one to begin with. Please, by all means, use it and any other well-meaning word to describe yourself!"

* Math is hard.

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