



Leather and Spice: Beginning the Journey

By Marianne Messina and Cleo Dubois

In this interview with Marianne Messina, Cléo Dubois talks about how her personal journey into BDSM began, where to find information when you don't have a mentor, and how BDSM can help people grow in their erotic relationships. A longer version of this article, aimed at newbies and those who are "kink curious" appeared on www.adultFriendFinder.com in August 2004.

Marianne Messina (MM): Can you briefly talk about your personal journey with BDSM and maybe what you've learned about the variety of options in the BDSM world?

CLÉO DUBOIS: I did not always know that I was kinky. In my 20s I loved to pick an argument with my lover, provoking him to get rough with me and then feel so sorry that he would do anything to please me! Well, that sort of manipulation totally disappeared from my life once I discovered my SM, the link that brought my sexuality into focus. I started to integrate all of the aspects of myself: brat, good girl, submissive, sadist, disciplinarian, mentor, control queen, Domina, mentor, slut, nurturer and ritualist.

In the early 80's, with the encouragement of a kinky boyfriend, I began exploring the SM frontiers in the San Francisco Leather Community. These fantasy/mind/body explorations were a powerful venue for my erotic fulfillment and self-discovery; they taught me that negotiated sadomasochism is a valid path to self-discovery, healing and intimacy. It didn't take me long to realize that I loved bottoming [being the one who submits] as well as topping [being the one who dominates], as long as it was consensual and negotiated.



I joined the first local SM education group, The Society of Janus [www.soj.org], attended all meetings and volunteered for everything: spanking, flogging, bondage, play piercing etc. Once I felt that I knew enough to be a safe player, I became a professional Dominant out of my

passion for the Scene.

MM: Say someone's trying something for the first time — bondage, spanking, whatever — and they don't have the benefit of a mentor, how can they approach it safely?

CLÉO DUBOIS: First look into your fantasies, and follow your intuition. Decide what you are willing to actualize. So, you want to be a little brat and be spanked by "Daddy," or you, Mr. Businessman, want to be a lipstick lesbian for the evening, tied up and teased by your girlfriend? If you think that the time is right, bring it up in loving conversation with your partner and listen to their response. If someone paints a picture you don't feel you fit in, say so. You are the only one who can tell if the idea of doing something kinky turns you on or off. Listen to yourself.

Start slow whether you are the top or the bottom. It is a real good idea to leave your partner wanting just a little more, but it can be devastating for both of you, to hurt him/her by pushing yourself or them, whether you are the bottom wanting more or the top wanting more.

MM: With so much sex education online, where do you advise that people just starting to explore BDSM go for reliable information?

In this day of the Internet it is certainly much easier than it was before Leatherfolks started coming out en masse to get informed. Today you can just type “BDSM” or “kinky” into your search engine and find an enormous amount of material. It can be truly overwhelming – the advice *might* be sound, but it might not.

One alternative is to join your local community. Most metropolitan areas have educational/social leather groups as well as “munches” where kinky folks, including people who are curious, can meet around a meal in a public restaurant – don’t worry, street clothes are the dress code and the conversation stays family friendly. It is a good idea to email the group leader/organizer first and ask some questions to get a comfort level about what to expect, who attends, etc.

San Francisco’s Greenery Press (www.greenerypress.com) specializes in books for the sexually adventurous, including nonfiction BDSM books. I maintain a [list of my favorites](#) on my website.



MM: What are some of the ways that BDSM can help people grow in erotic relationships?

CLÉO DUBOIS: Simply telling the truth about what you want sexually but have been embarrassed to ask for can be an immensely freeing experience, especially if it’s received well. Even if it isn’t, to be daring and put the truth out is healing in and of itself. Of course, fear of rejection is a big hurdle. I encourage people to pursue their sensual explorations freely, always pointing out the beauty of their vulnerability, sexual desires and sadomasochism. I truly find it beautiful in a world of distrust and repression to let someone guide you to these places, or allow yourself to go there. Erotic energy is good.

MM: As a dominant woman, you work with men, women and couples. Is there any way, that you’ve noticed, in which submissive women are different from submissive men?

CLÉO DUBOIS: There really is no comparison. Each person brings his/her own particular flavor to their submission, and each is beautiful in its own way. However, men tend to have more visual ideas in their fantasies and women are more about their feelings. Submissives of both genders always want to know if they please their Dominants.

MM: What elements of play or types of play do you find most enjoyable?

CLÉO DUBOIS: Oh there are so many...After a workshop in Los Angeles I was shown around their play space and they had a "classroom." As soon as I saw the big blackboard, the little school desks and the rulers I instantly became La Maitresse d'Ecole. The lesson was rather twisted, of course! Through the years I have surprised myself. Being of a curious nature, I didn't turn down any fantasy I considered safe until I had at least tried it once. Say, cross-dressing, I had no understanding of it until I met a marvelous "slut/masochist" cross dresser. Playing with him/her was just a blast!

On the private side of my life, I tend to act like a know-it-all brat in my bottoming mode. However, lately I have discovered the exquisite pleasure of surrendering if the chemistry is right between me and a very special partner AND we trust each other. What I always find enjoyable is the palpable energy exchange, be it sweet or fiery. Since I'm mainly a caring sadistic control Top, the games I most enjoy involve SM, verbal interaction and bondage dynamics.

MM: In addition to your intensive workshops for dominant women, you also teach many shorter workshops on a wide variety of BDSM topics. You mention that you often have people write their secret fantasies down and pass them in anonymously. So what fantasies turn up?

CLÉO DUBOIS: It was at a Learning Annex afternoon seminar called "Overcoming Sexual Shyness: Taking Charge," that I asked people to write down on a piece of paper either a fantasy they had or a secret they have never told their partner. We all live in the same society and share common archetypes and taboos. I was amazed that there was nothing really different from what SM people play with. The fantasies ranged from Queen for a Day to gang bang fantasies, to being "used" for the pleasure of lovers, to complete sensory deprivation.

An SM Scene isn't something ready-made. The real challenge is for people to have the courage to come out to their partners about their secrets and see if they can share their explorations mutually. Being clear and brave about what you want and what you are willing to do with those you are willing to do it with is the next step. Remember, you have the right to fantasize about whatever you want, fantasy alone never hurt anyone.

There are risks, though, like the possibility that your partner will reject you or be horrified, and that does hurt. Or that you might have a hard time dealing with what you did and feel shame. We all want to be good enough, don't we?

Just as we seek balance between Top and bottom to get the most out of our play, there are emotional highs and lows. You face these issues the way you do other matters in your life, with positive interpersonal communication and perhaps a longer than usual good hug.

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