



PHOTO/SOUMMYA DATTA

**MALCOLM** enjoys a "breast massage" from Mo. Both are members of Berkeley Bondage, Discipline and Sadomasochism.

# Bondage Fans Bond in Berkeley

## Internet, 'munches' connect scene

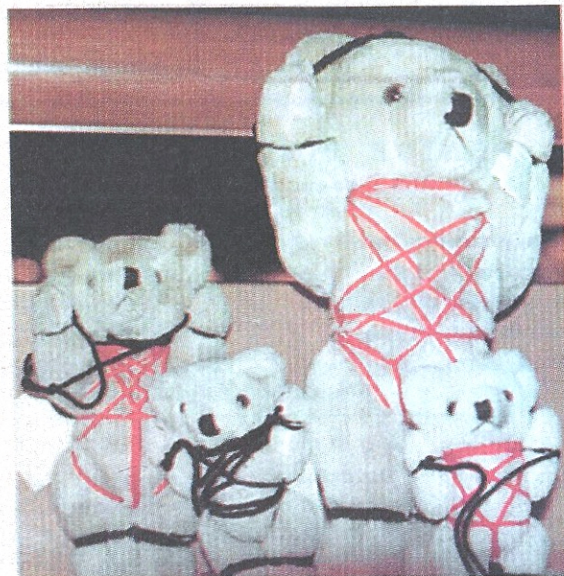
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CONTRIBUTING WRITER

**C**hains and whips and leather — oh my! Berkeley Bondage, Discipline and Sadomasochism enthusiasts explore how pain and pleasure fuse together to make sex play hurt so good.

Local professors, writers, lawyers and doctors by day abandon suits and scrubs for leather and lace at night. The scene is heavy with professionals, because people tend to enter the scene in their 30s — when they have fully discovered their "regular sexual identity," says Richard, a Berkeley resident who has been active in the bondage scene for about six years and prefers not to use his last name.

"Other than their sexual activities, they are distressingly normal," he says at a monthly bondage club meeting at a local brewery.

Berkeley bondage groups are very strict about a minimum age of 18. If a minor expresses interest in the groups, they are directed to informational sources and peer groups. The Society of Janus, San Francisco's premier bondage information base, has links on



PHOTO/SOUMMYA DATTA

**THESE CUTE TEDDIES** are among those sold by Charles "The Ruthless" at a recent BDSM Meeting.



# Bondage

FROM FRONT PAGE

their Web site, [www.soj.org](http://www.soj.org), for minors interested in alternative sexual play.

The bondage community is one of the most wired communities in the world, Richard says. Many people meet potential partners and find local activities on the Internet through discussion groups and message boards. Through networking, S&M newcomers and veterans get connected with local "munches" — casual social events where conversation ranges from the erotic to the everyday.

Castle Bar in San Francisco is a converted warehouse that holds "dungeon parties" where enthusiasts can have some fun. Dungeon parties, fandangos and play parties allow participants to leave their sexual inhibitions at the door. Revelers come as couples, singles and "triads," bringing toys, fetishes and expectations of a good time. Participants are tied up, whipped, chained and bound in gauze and leather.

Nothing is spared when it comes to carrying out the bondage party theme. Party-goers dress in elaborate costumes that bring a sense of adventure. Richard recalls one fandango where the dungeon was staged to look like a "medieval Spanish Inquisition setting" — complete with cages, whipping posts, stocks and restraints.

While some may feel alcohol and drugs are necessary to leave such inhibitions behind, they will not find any chemical substances at the parties, Richard says.

The bondage community is a very sober community, he says. Participants need to be in control and aware of their actions in order to guarantee safety. Dungeon monitors walk around carrying gloves and condoms, handing them out to all participants.

For the most part, the parties are

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Mo  
bondage enthusiast

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various roles at will to please their partners.

Berkeley munch meetings are alive and full of banter. To begin the evening attendees mingle before the actual meeting starts — socializing and ordering dinner. From there, people introduce themselves and their preferences — submissives, dominants, bisexuals, heterosexuals and so on.

Robert is the founder and host of the Berkeley munch. The munch has been meeting for a little over three years as an opportunity for people to get together, eat and talk.

"I was turned onto bondage while an undergraduate at Cal," Robert says. "I think people who like bondage are smarter people. They need more mental stimulation in all areas of their lives — conversation, classes, movies and sex."

One of the benefits of bondage, says Robert, is the enhanced communication fostered by partners.

"This is about whatever you need to be satisfied," he says. "Sex is a good thing."

Charles "The Ruthless" has been involved in the bondage lifestyle for more than 25 years. Along with his activity in S&M relationships, Charles has dabbled with "vanilla" partners. The term *vanilla* refers to a "June and Ward Cleaver-esque" way

of living, says Charles.

"I've been tying up girls since I was six," says Charles. "It's something that has always been there. I do it because it's fun."

Flugging for Flowers is one of Charles' business ventures, along with S&M comedy skits, educational demonstrations and bachelorette parties. He trains people who have never tried S&M how to take a walk on the sexual wild side.

"It's a lot of work for me but a lot of fun for them," Charles says earnestly of the bachelorette parties.

When it comes to his personal preferences and pleasing his partners, Charles takes his passion very seriously. He asks his partners to fill out a questionnaire that covers everything from fantasies to how much they are willing to explore.

"Everything I do is done professionally and it all depends on what they want," Charles says. "Hopefully they enjoy themselves."

It was a two-week fling dominated by rough, wild sex that led Mo to seek out a more fulfilling bondage lifestyle. Reading S&M fiction, such as novels by Anne Rice, and chatting with fellow enthusiasts on the Internet opened the door, but was not enough.

Through munches, Mo met more people and attended more parties, but as a boisterous woman with a desire for submissive sexual roles, she says she found it hard to find partners.

"It took a while, but I met a top and managed to find a community here," Mo says happily. "It may sound weird or extreme but I'm just a normal kind of kid."

Mo is taking her life story, bondage and all, to the stage this March in her one woman show "69 Stories."

"I want to make it accessible for everyone," Mo says. "It's fun to be in charge of your sexuality. It's all about knowing what you want."

— most people save the sex for when they get home, says August, “mistress” of Phil, both of whom attended Berkeley’s munch last month.

“If it’s not consensual, it’s abuse,” Phil says. “If it’s not safe, then it’s being done wrong.”

August, an upbeat and talkative local hairdresser, says she has been active in the bondage lifestyle for 10 years. Phil and August met at a play party and have been together for eight years.

“We live the lifestyle 24-7,” August says matter-of-factly. “He is my slave and I am his mistress.”

It took Madonna’s book “Sex” and her pushing the idea of “erotica” to bring bondage to a more open light, August says.

“(The book) was so mainstream that people might have taken a look at it and said, ‘Maybe that’s for me and I should see what’s out there,’” August says.

While some may think of bondage as consisting solely of whips and leather, there is a virtual dictionary of terms that are a “must-know” for enthusiasts. The “dominant” partner wields power and the “submissive” surrenders. The “top” gives or withholds physical sensation and the “bottom” receives or denies it. “Switch partners” move between