



Guest Video: Andrea Zanin

FROM WEEK THREE: SERVICE

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Hi, my name is Andrea Zanin, I've been on the receiving end of various kinds of service for approximately a decade at this point and it's been by far the most vulnerable and terrifying experience that I've ever had in the realm of m/s and d/s. That's for a long list of reasons and I think for me and I know that this is common for some people and not for everybody, my end of it is that I've always understood myself to be a really self sufficient and independent person. And so the idea of having somebody else actually want to take care of me meant that I had to give up some of my self sufficiency and let somebody else know what I needed. I needed to believe that they wanted that and that took a really long time. I needed to figure out how to explain what I wanted which meant that I needed to know what I wanted and that was really challenging and I needed to put a lot of trust in the person, that they were going to follow through. And that was really difficult for me.

And then on top of all that I needed to learn not to respond with simple gratitude, like 'Wow, that was really nice of you to do that thing, thank you so much!' but also to cultivate, in addition to being thankful, a level of management skill in terms of figuring out what was going to work for each different person and realising that that actually is quite, quite different per person, if you want to bring out their best and make them feel valued and seen and appreciated.

And then on top of all that, I had to learn to cultivate a sense of entitlement to that service which is really quite a difficult thing to do when you move through the world as a feminist and as one with a certain level of anti oppressive politics and you think of all the

ways in which people claiming entitlement over other people or over their work as being some of the worst kinds of rude at base and oppressive at worst behaviour that it's possible to put out there in the world. So, it's something that I think, having had it done to me, and not liked it, it was very difficult for me to understand how it could be a good thing to do it to somebody else.

So if I take those sort of three themes and expand on them a little bit, the first idea is around vulnerability and self knowledge.

I left home very young, I took care of myself without a lot of support and that led to a great deal of pride in my own self sufficiency and my independence. Having to rely on somebody did not come naturally. The first person who offered me service sort of made me really paranoid at first, first because I didn't know.. I sort of had a lot of questions around 'what if they don't come through? what if I say what I want and they don't understand it? or they think it's too quirky or burdensome or difficult?' And then it got to the point of, I would say, verging on true paranoia, where I was like 'but what if I forget how to do my own laundry? what'll I do then?' You know, and it was like everything was going to fall apart if I couldn't take care of myself.

So, it was really frightening to have to relax some of that and I think it's when I realised that I was concretely concerned that I was going to forget how to do laundry, that I sorta thought 'okay, that's ridiculous. You need to get over it.' and so I promptly did a lot of thinking and sort of pushed myself to get over it. Because it was so unreasonable.

So, in this realm of learning to receive service, I had to learn a balance between direction, as in giving direction to the other person and allowing them to anticipate. They've each got their advantages.

So, anticipatory service places the other person in control of it, which makes me as the receiver more vulnerable to whatever their interpretation of it might be, or failure to do that correctly, and so it also puts a great deal of reliance on their guesswork. And that depends, depending on their skill level or how well they know me that may go better or worse, or what have you, but it also means they can exercise a great deal of creativity and thoughtfulness. And in a sense, it's a really strong indication to me that they truly desire to be doing this, because they're the people, that person at that point, that person is the one truly putting themselves into a headspace of focus on me and what I need and what I want that's completely absent of me running the show.

Direction, on the other hand, places me in much greater control, but it also requires that I know what I want and be able to explain it well and take responsibility for providing the person with whatever tools they need to actually accomplish the task. So, it makes me more active and giving more input, which places more of the burden of responsibility on me.

Each of these requires work, they're just different kinds of work. On the one hand, there's the letting go and the trusting, on the other, there's management skill and the ability to express my needs and my desires.

On this topic of management skill, some of the questions I end up asking myself when a person is offering me service are: what level of formality versus informality do they want to do this with? For various people, there's a range of styles and y'know, to an extent there's gonna be about what I want, to an extent, it's gonna be about what they're bringing to the table.

How much specific direction do they need, versus a sort of general goal? Am I going to give them a result to achieve? 'I want dinner at six o'clock', or am I gonna give them a step by step procedure that I want them to follow, which I know will result in dinner being ready at six o'clock?

How much initiative or creativity do they have or do they want to have versus how much step by step explanation? What will bring out the best in this particular person? What will help them feel seen and appreciated? What will be most effective in achieving a goal and what about the question of balance? Just because somebody's really, really good at anticipation, doesn't mean they don't have to cultivate the ability to take direction. And just because someone is really good at taking direction, doesn't mean that they can't develop their creativity. So sometimes its about asking somebody to stretch in a direction that's not super natural to them just so it ends up not being too static of a dynamic.

What's most satisfying to me? How much work do I want to do? How hands on do I want to be? When does receiving service turn into me serving someone else's needs to give it or to be directed a certain way? Where's the balance in there? If I find that receiving service is requiring more energy of me than doing those things myself would, I have to ask myself if the balance is actually healthy for the relationship itself.

I'm also not the most controlling or micromanaging kind of person. So I'm really poorly matched for somebody who requires a high degree of that, whereas for somebody who's super control oriented and really wants their particular details to be done in a specific way, that might be a better dominant to be better matched for someone who needs a strong degree of that to feel good.

What about reward? What does this person who is providing service need to feel satisfied and rewarded there? I don't necessarily mean like prize money at the end of the day, but for some people it's a smile or a thank you, for some people that would actually be too much and what they would like is simply to know that everything went super smoothly and feel really good about that. For other people they actually need a lot of petting and cuddling and talking about it. And each person is going to be different and the thing that works for somebody may actually be the

thing that doesn't work for somebody else. And not everybody providing service knows this stuff going in, so this can require a certain level of conversation.

What about consequence? What about if something goes wrong? I'm not a big believer in punishment, I actually find it detrimental to most relationships in most contexts, and I think there's a strong tendency to conflate fun play that happens to include pain or roleplay with actual punishment, where somebody has actually done something damaging or wrong and needs to be corrected for it. I think there's too much squeezing those two ideas together, and the end result can be a very confusing message, or mixed message for the person on the receiving end, so I'm not a believer in doing a lot of punishment.

But that doesn't mean there's no consequence in case something has failed - and the consequence could be as simple as I am disappointed and it shows. It could be that there is a discussion or a clarification of what needs to happen. It could be that a technical issue needs to be resolved. Perhaps dinner couldn't happen, because the stove is broken. Whatever. Perhaps there is some training that needs to take place or some education and that can be anything from a formal you need to go and attend a class on such and such a topic, to a personal project like I'm gonna ask you to do some research so you know how to do this thing, or it can be hands on with me: here is precisely the way I like things to be done, watch me do it, let's do it together, that kind of thing.

There can also be the removal of whatever that particular service is from the list of what gets done. Not every service is something that each person can do. Some people are just naturally really good cooks, some people not so much. There's the question of working with the skills and the talents that a given person brings to the table, even if they're not intuitively the first thing I would be seeking. This is a personal relationship we're talking about here, I'm not hiring someone to do a job. It's about developing a dynamic with a person, through service, so that necessarily

has to take into account who they are as a person and what they bring.

Last on the list in this question of entitlement. The questions I ask about that are, what exactly am I entitled to and how do I best express that? What is the manner in which my entitlement needs to manifest in order for it to be meaningful, to all concerned?

The way I see it is that entitlement without consent is usually pretty abusive, unless we're talking about the general social contract. I do feel that I am entitled to y'know, cross at a green light and stop at a red one and everyone's going to respect those rules and so we're all entitled to expect a certain level of behaviour from each other.

But I'm talking about personal entitlement in relationship, so the way that I understand entitlement in this context is that it is a form of trust; I believe that you will do this thing that you've said you're gonna do, because I trust you. So that means I can behave as though I can take it for granted that that thing's going to happen. I don't have to doubt it, to the point where I would be shocked if it didn't happen. And so in that sense, that form of entitlement is an indication of a fairly extreme level of trust because it is special and particular to a relationship. If I walk into a room, I take off my coat, I don't even look and I let it drop and I trust that the person that I came in with is going to catch it before it hits the floor. That is a supreme indication of my trust in that person and my entitlement to their attentiveness or their service in that way.

This is the desired kind of taking for granted. The difference here is about appropriateness. I am entitled to X from you. I'm not entitled to X from everybody. I think that question of boundaries is one where some people screw up, they start to believe they have an entitlement to a certain type of behaviour from everybody around them, simply by their station in the world as a dominant and that's where I think there's a lot of mistakes that get made, even if to some people that can seem really sexy at first. (It's not!)

So, I think I have lots to say about service, and in some ways, I think there's very little that I can do that wouldn't just scratch the surface, especially in the context that we're not having a direct one on one conversation, but I do hope this has been helpful, and I want to say thank you very kindly to Sinclair, for inviting me to take part in this, thank you to you for listening, and I hope you enjoy the rest of the course.

