

Know Your Pleasure Curve

From time to time I am reminded of an essential element of BDSM; making it personal to each of us as individuals. The inherent freedom to construct our consensual power exchange to reflect our own personal needs, wants, preferences, tastes and desires. But we don't do so in a vacuum. There are, all around us, influences that have profound effects upon us and our choices.

From the media stereotypes and mainstream societal prejudices, to the opinions and preferences of others in the lifestyle, we are (to varying degrees) affected by the choices of others. The net effect of such influences (in my observation and opinion) tends to homogenize the lifestyle as people "feel" less freedom to practice it to their tastes, and are influenced by the predominant (or most common) tastes of others (as well as the common vanilla stereotypes and prejudices that we have all been exposed to prior to discovering the lifestyle).

I've seen the effect this has had on the nature of what individuals describe as their submission, their Dominance, their B/D & S/M activities, their methods of behavior modification and reinforcement (punishment & discipline) and many other integral parts of BDSM. People, especially those newer to the lifestyle, become more of what they feel is expected of them, rather than more of who they truly are. That saddens and concerns me, because in large part, the net result is that people are not as gratified and fulfilled as they could otherwise be. And the lifestyle choices they make are not always reflective of what is best for them, as an individual. In point of fact, it removes some of the element of choice (and hence consent) when anyone makes decisions that they feel are expected of them via stereotype or prejudice. And lest anyone misconstrue what I'm saying, I'm making no reference to the expectations, obligations or responsibilities that two individuals make freely (without such outside influences) between themselves in the construct of a relationship dynamic.

One of the areas in which I've seen these influences have a profound (and often deleterious) effect is in scening. In public conversations, and the comparison of them to private

conversations, I find that many individuals feel a certain pressure towards conformity. To participate in and enjoy the activities most others enjoy, to avoid those that most others do not, and to enjoy them in the same way, and with the same intensity, that most do (or would it be better said, the same way that most publicly claim to?).

And that's the focus of this article (you knew I'd get to it eventually), the intensity level of B/D & S/M play activities. Judging by the public conversations (especially those prevalent in online chat rooms) you'd assume that every submissive enjoys having their physical limits of endurance pushed, and that every Dominant enjoys pushing them. I think the inference is that if you don't enjoy doing that, you're somehow less of a submissive, or less of a Dominant (and thus, the tacit influence towards conformity). And nothing could be further from the truth.

If we were to quantify "intensity" in a measurable way, and then plot it on a graph, each of us would have a chart that was unique to us individually. That makes perfect sense, given that we are all unique individuals and we'd expect to enjoy differing levels of "intensity". Some submissives enjoy the mildest of floggings, and some Dominants enjoy giving mild floggings. That's compatibility between submissive and Dominant. On the other hand, some submissives really prefer an intense flogging, and some Dominants enjoy really letting it rip. That's compatibility as well. And then there's every conceivable level in between the mild and the wild.

But the lifestyle influence towards the pushing of limits encourages everyone to lean towards the wild, whether that reflects their true needs, desires and enjoyment or not. Who wants to be seen as a "lesser" submissive, or, God forbid, a "lesser" Dominant? The net effect is that we often compromise our individual pleasure, in favor of our perceived reputation within the lifestyle community.

The "pleasure curve" (that quantified and graphed intensity vs. pleasure) in a B/D S/M activity (for both submissives on the receiving end, and Dominants on the giving end) comes in an infinite variety. But for purposes of understanding (yes, this is an

over simplification and generalization), let's consider three in this article; the "bell curve", the "sheer cliff", and the "endless slope".

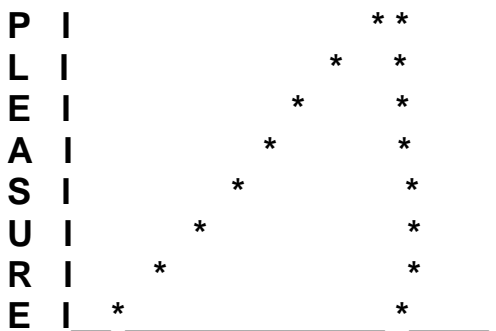
The Bell Curve



Everyone remembers what a bell curve looks like. In this example, as a B/D S/M activity increases in intensity, the pleasure (for both the submissive as a receiver, and Dominant as a giver) also increases. At some point (different for each individual) a level of maximum pleasure is achieved, and any additional intensity detracts from the pleasure. I'm not big on labels, but I've often heard of submissives and Dominants whose pleasure curves resemble bell curves referred to as "sensual".

People whose pleasure curves resemble a bell curve may not desire to have their limits pushed (as a submissive), or to push them (as a Dominant). They should feel free from any influence that might encourage them to go beyond the apex of their mutual pleasure curve.

The Sheer Cliff

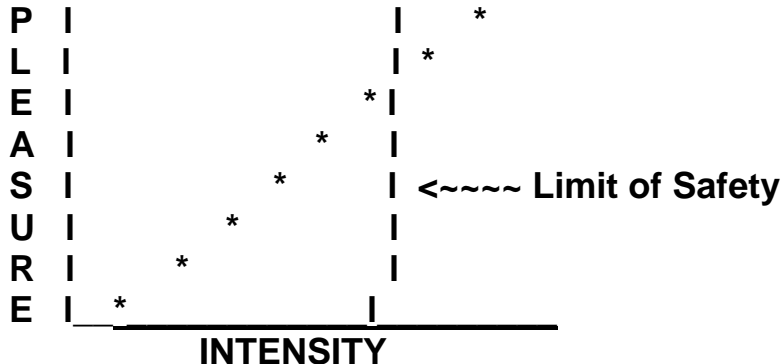


INTENSITY

In this generalization, as the intensity level increases, the pleasure derived from it also increases. Until a point is reached (we might call that a "limit" of sorts) in which the pleasure suddenly and precipitously drops.

People whose pleasure curves resemble a sheer cliff may enjoy pushing limits. They may enjoy "edge play". They may desire to come as close to the edge of that cliff as possible, without falling over it.

The Endless Slope



Again, this is an overgeneralization for purposes of illustration. But in this group that might include Sadists and masochists, the pleasure derived from the intensity of a B/D S/M activity continues to increase along with the intensity, seemingly without end. Rather than achieving an apex of pleasure and sustaining it, or coming tantalizingly close to some cliff (limit) to maximize pleasure, the endless slope continues to rise. So what is the "limit" to the endless slope? I would propose that it is safety. At some point, the intensity of a B/D S/M activity reaches a level beyond which it would be unsafe to continue further. And yes, that level is different for every individual.

People whose pleasure curve resembles the endless slope show (necessarily) great restraint. It's quite tempting to desire to continue to push the envelope, and to achieve a greater level of pleasure from the activity. Generally, they do push those limits, in

an effort to safely extend them, and in doing so, increase the level of enjoyment derived from them.

Which type of pleasure curve do you have? Only you can know that. And in truth, you may not know for certain until and unless you have some play experience... another reason that you had best have a play partner that you trust, particularly if you find it necessary to adapt to conditions as you discover them. But once you do know it, be honest with yourself about its existence and communicate it openly and honestly to your play partner. Be confident enough in yourself to understand that having a higher or lower threshold of intensity that maximizes your pleasure has nothing to do with your level of Dominance or submission. And do not judge, influence or coerce others, either overtly or implicitly, regarding their own pleasure curve.

What does knowing your pleasure curve do for you? It helps you to find compatibility in a play partner and adequately convey your expectations and needs. Relationships or encounters with significantly divergent pleasure curves will find one or the other, or both, feeling ungratified, unfulfilled or worse.

Knowing your pleasure curve will help you to derive the maximum enjoyment out of your play experiences, and to do so as safely as possible.

Rover

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