

## Beneath its Curious Surface, 'Fifty Shades of Grey' a Dangerous Menace to Society

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Rating: **2.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Strike one of far too many: “Fifty Shades of Grey” author Erika Leonard (better known as E.L. James) has never lived the BDSM lifestyle. And therefore, nor should she be writing about, romanticizing and profiteering on it. On a \$40 million budget, the film earned \$30.2 million on its opening Friday and is on track for a record-breaking international weekend grab of \$158 million.

But this is as irresponsible as an author writing about rape who has never been. Anne Rice wrote “The Sleeping Beauty Quartet” (four erotic BDSM novels under the pseudonym A.N. Roquelaure), but she was actually engaged in BDSM with her husband. Experienced with it, Rice also wrote the BDSM romance novels “Exit to Eden” and “Belinda” under the pen name Anne Rampling.



“Fifty Shades of Grey” stars Dakota Johnson as the innocent and naïve Anastasia Steele.

Image credit: Universal Pictures

While “Fifty Shades of Grey” is every trashy novelist’s dream, there are much better ones including Sylvia Day’s “Bared to You,” Leah Brooke’s “Crescendo,” Maya Banks’ “Sweet Addiction,” Catherine Millet’s “Sexual Life of Catherine M.” and Nicholson Baker’s “House of Holes”. There are some things that just take firsthand experience and the private, serious and respectful world of bondage, discipline, sadism and masochism is definitely one.

Though BDSM is nothing new, what "Fifty Shades of Grey" is newly doing – and is doing very successfully – is making it mainstream. That's dangerous, though, because it shouldn't be. BDSM is a private world, and at the end of the day with "Fifty Shades," the interesting parts aren't new and the new parts aren't interesting.

But talking about sex is healthy, right? Sometimes, yes, but this isn't just sex and BDSM isn't for mass consumption. Becoming the first introduction into this private world for many folks who had never otherwise considered it, these books and this film gives some of us false hope and unrealistic expectations. This twisted truth could end up getting some people hurt physically and mentally.



In "Fifty Shades of Grey", Jamie Dornan and Dakota Johnson step into the iconic roles of billionaire entrepreneur Christian Grey and curious college student Anastasia Steele.

*Image credit: Universal Pictures, Focus Features*

"He's not my kind of guy," Jamie Dornan has been quoted as saying about his role as Christian Grey. "I don't like the idea of someone telling a girl what she should eat and how much she should exercise. That's not right. Obviously. I don't know anyone in Belfast like him at all. None of my [Irish] mates would carry on like that."

It's just a job, but he chose to accept it and get rich and famous for it. And beyond his capitalism off of this worldwide phenomenon, the dangers of exposing BDSM to the uneducated public are not to be trifled with and are quite serious. BDSM isn't a world people just fall into curiously and 21-year-old virgins don't go from never having had sex to BDSM.

A dominant/submissive relationship doesn't originate from a professional interview. In reality, they begin online or after a fetish event. And no true BDSM kinkster would shop in an Ace Hardware-like store and use harsh rope, duct tape or cable ties in their red room of pleasurable pain.



Jamie Dornan stars as billionaire entrepreneur Christian Grey in "Fifty Shades of Grey".

*Image credit: Chuck Zlotnick, Universal Pictures, Focus Features*

But "Fifty Shades of Grey," apparently, isn't trying to be any sort of reality. It's supposed to be OK that the books and the movie suspend your belief of real life to allow men and women everywhere – young and wise – to escape. The stories are particularly targeted at women. They are seen as "mommy porn" or fantastic fantasies for angry, bitter ladies to read when their deadbeat husbands just aren't doing the trick for them in bed and otherwise.

Christian Grey doesn't exist. For starters, not for one second does this film convince me that he's a successful businessman and Grey House is actually a real entity. The film artificially and quickly sets him up with his helicopter, pretty work ladies, bachelor pad and caretakers. And, of course, luxury cars. "Which one is yours?," Ana questions innocently. Christian replies formulaically: "All of them."

In Anastasia Steele's interview with Christian Grey – conveniently in place of her sick roommate doing it – she asks about the key to his success. Just "being good with people" isn't enough. David Fincher's "The Social Network" took time to explore the hard-working neuroses of Mark Zuckerberg so you'd be convinced that he could found the multibillion-dollar Facebook.



Jamie Dornan and Dakota Johnson in "Fifty Shades of Grey".

*Image credit: Universal Pictures, Focus Features*

Christian taking one business call and being angry at someone for some unknown reason is laughable. The scene does nothing to convince you that he's earned the billions of dollars he's been given by his author and no other scenes exist to try to convince you further. Instead, the film just has him focusing on his relationship with the young and naïve Ana who goes from the chastity Disney belt in the bedroom to getting

lashed and suspended in Christian's non-Xbox playroom.

Obviously leaving out key scenes from the book – and that's fine because a movie is never *exactly* like the novel and novelist loyalists need to get over that – the film decides to focus on things like Ana biting her lip instead of answering questions about Christian's mysterious upbringing, his success or trying to be a realistic portrayal of BDSM.

The film has a dual personality. On one hand, it could be viewed as provocative subject matter to safely spice up the sex life in healthy, loving couples. On the other, it could be a damaging and unrealistic introduction into a world many people don't understand and shouldn't engage.



Dakota Johnson stars as curious college student Anastasia Steele in "Fifty Shades of Grey".

*Image credit: Universal Studios, Focus Features*

And Ana biting her lip represents this duality as a double entendre. On one hand, it could mean she's turned on. But on the other, it could be a nervous tick like playing with her hair or biting her fingernails. Either way, the act certainly incites the dominant in Christian to punish her because he views it as improper.

In teasing an older Mrs. Robinson character who introduced Christian to BDSM and "made him this way," the film ties his dark past to abuse. "Fifty Shades" especially does a serious disservice to people living with domestic abuse. Just because Christian doesn't do anything to Ana that she doesn't willingly "say yes" to doesn't mean he's not abusive.

He was made this way by another woman and now perpetuates it to new people. This film speaks nothing about his father figure and only briefly introduces his mom as Marcia Gay Harden.

Christian and Ana change each other into people they are not. While Christian hardens Ana, Ana softens him. She struggles to inspire him to let her in emotionally. He struggles to convince Ana to sign a submissive contract and be satisfied with a steamy sex life devoid of everyday dates and traditional relationship norms.



Jamie Dornan in "Fifty Shades of Grey".

Image credit: Universal Pictures, Focus Features

Perhaps it's because I've seen so many films and hardly anything shocks me any more, but "Fifty Shades of Grey" – to earn its "R" rating instead of "NC-17," which would have caused it to make less money – is actually much more tame than I thought it would be.

In terms of how much it pushes the envelope, "Fifty Shades" only licks the seal as compared to much more graphic and controversial films like Lars von Trier's brilliant and unrated "Nymphomaniac: Vol. 1" and "Nymphomaniac: Vol. 2," which was released to a much smaller audience, or 1975's "NC-17"-rated "The Story of O".

Beneath its curious surface, "Fifty Shades of Grey" is an uninformed and unrealistic "romance" set in the BDSM world that dangerously dramatizes sexual violence and glamorizes domestic abuse. It perpetuates the false perception that a young, innocent and attractive woman can find real love within violent sex by changing a controlling, manipulative and jealous man into a good husband.

**Note: This "R"-rated film is intended for mature audiences only.**

It is rated "R" for strong sexual content including dialogue, some unusual behavior and graphic nudity and for language. *You must be 17+ to attend a showing of this film.*

*"Fifty Shades of Grey" stars Jamie Dornan, Dakota Johnson, Marcia Gay Harden, Jennifer Ehle, Rita Ora, Luke Grimes, Victor Rasuk, Eloise Mumford, Max Martini, Callum Keith Rennie and Dylan Neal from director Sam Taylor-Johnson, producers Michael De Luca and Dana Brunetti and writer Kelly Marcel based on the novels by E.L. James. The film, which opened on Feb. 13, 2015 and has a running time of 125 minutes, is rated "R" for strong sexual content including dialogue, some unusual behavior and graphic nudity and for language.*



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