

DON'T LET FIFTY SHADES OF GREY RUIN YOUR VALENTINE'S WEEKEND

By Gail Dines on Feb 11, 2015 with 64 Comments

<http://verilymag.com/christian-grey-fifty-shades-of-grey-movie-domestic-violence/>

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This Valentine's Day, countless moviegoers plan to make a date with *Fifty Shades of Grey*'s Christian Grey. I'm not one of them. I've met him before. More importantly, I've met the women he's dated. I can tell you that any woman who's ever met a real-life Christian Grey does everything she can to avoid repeating it. She's a battered woman.

For those who have not read the book, a short recap will be useful. The "hero" of the book, 28-year-old Christian Grey, is a wealthy sexual sociopath who targets and cajoles an emotionally and sexually unsophisticated 21-year-old, Anastasia Steele (who often sounds so naive and immature that she could easily pass for an adolescent), into agreeing to sadistic sex that leaves her sometimes bleeding and too bruised to move. And in true "romance" story style, she keeps coming back for more.

According to the *Hollywood Reporter*, “The coming attraction for the erotic drama based on the hit E.L. James novel notched more than 36 million YouTube views in its first week.” This comes as no surprise to scholars of pop culture. The movie trailer for *Fifty Shades of Grey*, along with the trilogy of books it’s based on, is nothing short of a media phenomenon. The trilogy, which is among the fastest-selling books of all time, has been celebrated by the media as “porn for women” and a playful fantasy that encourages women to become more daring in their sexuality.

Missing from this hype, of course, is a detailed discussion of how the books eroticize violence against women and render invisible the predatory tactics the “hero” uses to groom, seduce, and abuse a much younger woman.

We get a glimpse of Christian’s idea of foreplay when he and Anastasia, in the throes of a new love, get “intimate” in an elevator. “Before I know it, he’s got both of my hands in his viselike grip above my head, and he’s pinning me to the wall using his lips ... His other hand grabs my hair and yanks down... ” At this point, many of us are rooting for Anastasia to run for her life, but this being a “romance” novel and all, she stays for more.

Within a couple of chapters, his foreplay has progressed into full-blown violence:

“Suddenly he grabs me, tipping me across his lap... He throws his right leg over both mine and plants his left forearm on the small of my back, holding me down so I cannot move... and he hits me – hard.”

The well-resourced PR machine that promoted the books, and now the film, plays a major role in pushing this anti-feminist message across the western world. The author, E.L. James, appeared on numerous prime-time television and radio shows, and as I watched her being interviewed, it was clear that the goal of each segment was to promote the book as cutting-edge fantasy that was a “must-read” for every woman wanting to “spice up” her sex life.

I did not see a single mainstream interview that discussed the violence or the possible harm in glossing over the way that wealthy Christian Grey emotionally, physically, and sexually abused a naive, vulnerable younger woman. Rather, many of the segments ended with interviews of women who said that their flagging sex

lives with their husbands had now taken a turn for the better, thanks to *Fifty Shades*.

Only by contextualizing *Fifty Shades* in the larger pop-porn culture can we begin to understand its popularity and impact on our culture at large. From Robin Thicke's bestselling song "Blurred Lines" which tells women "I know you want it" over and over again, to the raping and killing of prostituted women in the *Grand Theft Auto* video game series, pop culture is awash in images that normalize violence against women. Research by media sociologists has shown that the more consistent and coherent the messages across a range of media genres, the more power they have to construct the worldview of media consumers.

This helps in somewhat explaining why women of all ages are swooning over Christian Grey and misreading his obsessive, cruel behavior as evidence of love and romance. In addition, part of the reason for this is that his wealth acts as a kind of luxury cleansing cream for his abuse, and his pathological attachment to Anastasia is reframed as devotion, since he showers her with lavish gifts. This is a very retrograde and dangerous world for young women to buy into, and I would submit it speaks to the appalling lack of any public consciousness as to the reality of violence against women.

Here in the real world, we know that *Fifty Shades* is a myth. In his book on batterers, Lundy Bancroft provides a list of potentially dangerous signs to watch out for from boyfriends. Mr. Grey is the poster boy of the list, not only with his jealous, controlling, stalking, sexually sadistic behavior but his hypersensitivity to what he perceives as any slight against him, his whirlwind romancing of a younger, less powerful woman, and his Jekyll-and-Hyde mood swings. Any one of these is potentially dangerous, but a man who exhibits them all is lethal and should be avoided at all costs.

And perhaps the even bigger lie of the *Fifty Shades* trilogy, and no doubt the film, is that Anastasia nurtures and loves him out of his sadism and brutality. Indeed, men like Christian Grey are never loved out of battery; they just keep getting more drunk on their power over women. Believing they'll change is the dangerous fantasy that keeps many women in their grip. Battered women's shelters and graveyards are full of women who had the misfortune to meet a Christian Grey. But films that tell the truth about sexual sadists like Christian Grey—films where we

see broken bones, black eyes, and motherless, traumatized children—don't seem to generate the same profits.

So let us send a message to Hollywood this Valentine's Day. Let's take the money we'd easily drop on a movie date night and give a [much-needed donation to a battered women's shelter](#). Because the real women out there, who've met real Christian Greys, need it.

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