

“FIFTY SHADES OF GREY” DECONSTRUCTED

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Betty Friedan’s classic, “The Feminist Mystique,” launched the feminist revolution of the 1960s. Women, she said, were too often controlled by men, left to live a sterile suburban life that amounted to a “comfortable concentration camp.” Fast forward to Valentine’s Day 2015: millions of women will celebrate their liberation by going to see, “Fifty Shades of Grey,” the movie based on the book by E.L. James. What they will be celebrating is a young woman’s total domination by a control freak.

The book and the movie are an attempt to take the kink out of kinky, i.e., to normalize sexual deviance. Paradoxically, those most drawn to the book are seeking to find the liberation that Friedan promised. But this time they are not interested in competing with men in the workforce; rather, they are seeking to submit themselves to what might be called Fifty Shades of Slavery. That’s a rough index of the many ways they can indulge their BDSM (bondage, dominance, and sadomasochism) fantasies.

A professional dominatrix in Los Angeles, Mistress Trinity, says she uses the book “in sessions as a torture device.” She is very serious. “Very bad slaves have to read the book aloud and act out scenes. One of my slaves pleaded with me to stop the pain, offering to receive 100 strokes of the cane if he could stop reading.”

Do most women attracted to this book aspire to being a slave? No, but it would be a big mistake to underestimate their interest in being dominated by a man. That there are as many males willing to assume the role of quasi-slavemaster is

indisputable.

Fans of the book love Christian, the protagonist who gets Ana to submit to his will (her "consent" is a sham). He is the consummate manipulator. After she is beaten by him, he attempts to massage her emotions by instructing her to move on. "Don't waste your energy on guilt, feelings of wrongdoing, etc." Score one for Christian.

Ana gets assaulted over and over, but unlike many in real life who toy with BDSM, she recovers. Those who think I am exaggerating, consider what Cory Silverberg, an expert on the subject, says: "The first thing to know about those now unwanted objects up your or anyone else's bum is that they're a common sight in ER departments and something doctors and nurses expect. A night without a misplaced toothbrush or potato, is, apparently, not much of a night."

Doctors who have to deal with the consequences of BDSM agree. "Not uncommonly, a call is placed from the emergency room physician to the surgeon," a detached observer writes, "requesting help extracting a rectal foreign object. In most cases, the uncomfortable and embarrassed patient has tried for hours or days to remove the offending object himself (rarely 'herself')."

These practices are not limited to adults. A scientific study of BDSM found that colorectal foreign bodies have been extracted from the rectums of two-year olds. "Bottles, light bulbs, dildos, vibrators, fruits or vegetables are just a few of the objects extracted from the colon or rectum. Other, more unusual items include old radio vacuum tubes, coat hangers and enema kits filled with red wine instead of the standard enema fluid."

A respected ER physician, who also practices BDSM, offers sage advice: Beware of glass. "Glass toys seemingly have gained in popularity recently, but so has the dangers associated with

them...Glass toys should be avoided at all costs—no matter how tempting.”

Much more than glass is popular with Vermont’s BDSM crowd. “Their tastes and desires run the gamut—including polyamory, scarification, needle-and-knife play, foot fetishism and fun with urine, scat, vomit and lactation—just to scratch the surface.” These practices involve “pain, restraints, sharp objects or implements inserted into orifices,” resulting in “the risk of incurring wounds and bruises, not to mention the embarrassment of explaining their causes to an emergency-room attendant.”

It is debatable which is worse—the physical or the psychological damage incurred by BDSM. It is also debatable who else is attracted to “Fifty Shades of Grey,” besides white suburban mothers.

Dr. Judith Reisman, a psychologist who has written extensively on sexual deviance, agrees with the assessment of the book by one of her clinical psychiatrist associates. The book, they maintain, is about pedophilia. Ana, the female who submits, is given the age of 21 but her “true emotional age is much-much younger.” She has had “no sexual experience whatsoever,” a clear turn-on to pedophiles. Also, she talks “like a girl.” They note that she “talks about cartwheels, and skipping, over and over again,” which is why they conclude that this “is the language and imagery of a girl.”

Even Mistress Trinity sees the girl in Ana. She calls her a “naive college student with an elementary school vocabulary.” Significantly, Sam Taylor Johnson, the filmmaker, describes Ana as a girl. He pointedly says that his goal was to “take this girl on a journey.” When looked at from this perspective, it makes sense that the opening panel on the website of the book’s author features Christian saying to Ana, “I want to show you my playroom.”

So there may be more than just some innocent fantasies at work. "Fifty Shades of Slavery" aptly describes what else is in play.