

I admit it. I am an almost 70 year old widow. The only “shades of gray” I am concerned about are in my hair. However, my memory is still intact. I clearly remember sex; we used to call it making love. That’s certainly what we called it on Valentine’s Day. Even those of us with gray hair still recall sex as being fun, playful, frisky, affectionate, and consensual; some of us are even still doing it. Sex was not dark, did not hurt, and was not scary; except when we were dumb and forgot birth control.

As a therapist, I often listen to clients talk about their sexual relationships. A 14 year old, who actually thinks I’m “cool”, is willing to talk about her first love and ask questions. A serious, brilliant 20 year old college student, who considers herself bi-sexual and is adamant in her support of gay marriage and transgender, is infuriated by the premise of “50 Shades” – finds it degrading to women.

A 50 year old, long-married with an active happy sex life, said she tried to read the book, actually gasped out loud on the beach and stopped reading. She just didn’t like it. Her question was “What woman would let a man talk to her like this?” Another 55 year old, healthy marriage, avid reader, and extremely sophisticated stopped reading because “It was stupid”.

Okay, I kept asking. A 35 year old, more or less, responded, “Yuck, porn for the masses and making millions on sensationalism”. Another 30 year old middle school teacher worried about what we are saying to our young people about gender equality. A mother of 3 adult daughters commented, “As a mother of daughters, I find it repulsive”. A pastor I spoke with, totally reserving judgment, worried that young people, particularly, may have difficulty with the genre separating reality from fantasy. Another gay gentleman felt that the film may jeopardize the safety of women. Safe word or not. Many of my concerns are reflected in these comments. Somehow I have not encountered the millions of women who bought, read and loved the book.

As a specialist in domestic abuse, I am concerned that the film normalizes, encourages, and glamourizes sexual/male dominance. This is not about erotica – this is domestic violence, power, and control. On Valentine’s Day, a couple, after a lovely dinner, sees this movie, gets home and expects to replicate what they just witnessed on the big screen, without, however, the personal trainers and ice packs that the actors required performing some of the acrobatics. As real people, can we or should we try to meet these expectations and what is the film saying about male/female relationship dynamics?

A 97 year old, recuperating from hip surgery, joked that this was the longest time she ever spent in bed without having fun. We remember. We even like it. We just don’t want to have to be Olympic gymnasts, world class athletes or play blind man’s bluff. Incidentally, she didn’t break her hip having sex. Remember, sex doesn’t hurt.

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