

## **The 50 Shades of Grey phenomenon: Why has BDSM become so mainstream?**

In 2011, the first part of the '50 shades of grey' trilogy came out and became a world bestseller; it brought BDSM (bondage/domination, sadism/masochism) from being marginal to fashionable, targeting women between 25 and 60 years of age. A few months ago, I was asked to write the analysis of the memoirs of a dominatrix mistress called Maitresse Diane who is now 64. This was very interesting to me as it gave me insight on a world I did not know.

After being abandoned, betrayed and sexually abused Diane could no longer trust people and had difficulty interacting with people at an equal footing. Love and pain had become intertwined and almost synonymous. The way she found to interact with men in a secure way was by escaping her vulnerable self by becoming a dominatrix mistress. She then felt secure and in control in the role where she became the master/aggressor and that men became her slaves. She interpreted their suffering for her as signs of love as she had always experienced love with suffering. She re-enacted her traumatic life experiences as the aggressor which made her feel secure in the short-term but would maintain and keep her traumatic experiences in the present.

Understanding the life of Maitresse Diane and of her clients also gave me insight on today's society. Why has BDSM become so mainstream and popular?

Lately, countless articles on the subject have appeared in the media. Some even stating that people who practice BDSM are happier and more intelligent, which I believe is completely false.

Firstly, these articles do not make a very important distinction. There is a wide spectrum in BDSM ranging from playful blindfolding to sowing lips and stapling one's testicles to the table. Being playful in the bedroom is good, but punishment and humiliation is not.

Why would someone put themselves through this hard BDSM? In the hard form of BDSM, there is no sex, only pain and humiliation. Who would want to do this to themselves? Usually, in the S&M world, there is a master slave relationship. The aim is to alleviate client's tension through overcompensation, to create a balance between control and responsibility that offers security as well as the evacuation of tension through physical pain which would give a sense of relief. The problem with this overcompensation is that it is an escape from reality and that the correction is never made in real life. This results in the sensitization to the real life situation which becomes even more unbearable over time. In addition, BDSM usually sets the stage in a way that ends up confirming and feeding one's negative beliefs which distorts perception in a negative way as well as damaging self worth and self confidence.

Men who seek the services of a dominatrix mistress are usually men with power and authority. The mistress's role is to stage a situation that will allow escape and relief. They pay her to become her slaves. By becoming slaves and suffering for her, they abdicate any responsibility that comes with the authority they hold. This gives them momentary relief in the short-term. The problem in the long-term is that it becomes harder to reach this relief as they habituate and get used to the abuse. This leads to an escalation of the intensity of the domination. On the other hand, people with low authority who are bullied and coerced by rigid rules and ruthless bosses reassure themselves by seeking to dominate and abuse in their intimate relations by taking on the master/aggressor role.

Does this mean that all people on the extremities of the authority spectrum will deviate into hard BDSM practices? Lucky not, people will tend to seek this compensation when they are unable to accept their real life situation. When one does not accept the facts of their reality, they will try to escape their reality somehow. Over time, escaping becomes more difficult as the reality becomes more painful to see.

I believe that BDSM has become more common today because of the highly demanding and stressful environment we live in. Sex was always a powerful way or relieving tension and stress, but this was a side effect, not the aim. When the function of intimacy is to manage stress, then one gets an escalation and deviation of the behaviour which allows them to reach the goal, which is relief through escaping reality. Being with one's partner is no longer about unity or about sharing and caring. The partner becomes instrumental in a desperate attempt to secure one's self.

50 Shades of Grey, which is destined to women, became a bestseller because of its timing. Should it have come out 20 years ago, you would have never heard of it. Women today are in an even more difficult situation than men. They need to perform like men at the work place and to be good mothers and wives at home. Society has evolved faster than evolution. Men want and have the need to protect their women and women want and need to feel protected and secured by their man. Unfortunately in our society, this has been frowned upon and has created insecurity in both sexes, which leads both sexes to desperately try to find security in different ways.

This is why, I believe, 50 shades of Grey has appealed to women today, it has allowed them in an 'acceptable/fashionable' way to experience the comfort and relief of delegating control and responsibility by being submissive and dominated. I believe that mutual support and trust is key in a relationship but introducing S&M practices to your relationship is not necessary and could become more harmful than helpful should it escalate. It's important to understand that security and control do not need to come from domination.

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