

Please see below for an excerpt of an op-ed I wrote in the Fall of 2015 to reflect on the release of the film *50 Shades of Grey*. I chose this as a writing sample because I believe it demonstrates my character and insight, as well as my writing ability, urged by my Honors professor to submit this powerful piece to the school's student-run newspaper.

Fifty Shades of Abuse

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Sitting in the theater, I was surrounded by dispersed groups of giggly college-aged females, middle-aged couples, and a large group of coworkers, who all happily brought in their Barefoot Wine bottles to prepare for a great time. My boyfriend and I sat in the far back right, hiding from all of the drunken audience members but also perhaps just...hiding. We were intrigued by the premise of the movie but not nearly as excited to watch it unfold as everyone else was, ourselves not wanting to even be seen there. However, after discussing love in [my Honors Colloquium] class during the weeks prior, I felt it necessary to pursue this outside event as a polar opposite competitor: lust and the lack of genuine love.

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First and foremost, I remember the consistent imagery of [the protagonist] Anastasia sleeping alone. After every BDSM scene, even when he angrily came to her house unannounced, even after he casually took her virginity, Christian always left the room and never turned back... I was heartbroken and sympathetic for the character, losing her virginity to be, in crude terms, willingly bought into a sex slave position. Used as an expendable toy, Ana slept in a luxurious room on a different floor than Christian's in his extravagant penthouse apartment, expected to be there every Friday to Sunday to "explore" sexual activities in his Play Room and satisfy his every whim. In agreeing to pursue this BDSM relationship with Christian, Ana would be rewarded with the grace of his presence, a new car, and new clothing: clearly a sad perspective about what audiences approve to be valid gestures of *love, romance*.

While being contracted into "living" with Christian every weekend, the most pungent sinking in my stomach came when Ana finally fought back, saying she wanted more, more romance and going out to dinners and movies like "normal couples," she said. I was so proud for this weak, archetypal portrayal of a female, breaking out of her role and standing up for herself. However, Christian retorted that he could offer her *one date night a week*, retaining his nondisclosure policy, no-bed-sharing policy, and certainly the no-saying-no policy. As soon as Christian offered her this semblance of compromise, audience in the theater cooed and awed, as if he had just offered to marry her and change his ways. The audience melted!

What a sad state it is for America if we can be bystanders to a single person ruling a relationship, bossing the other person around in torturous ways, physically and emotionally – as well as monetarily. If that abuser fleetingly bends to allow one glimpse of potentially acceptable courting behavior, the crowd eats it right up and cannot get enough of it. How can viewers not see the sadness in Ana's eyes when she is all alone as she falls asleep at night, after a tumultuous day? When she is tied up and beaten, albeit (debatably) consensually, with a flogger or a cane to the point of tears? When did it become acceptable for the modern gentleman to treat women like objects, providing them with helicopter rides and fancy dinners in order to lure them into sex dungeons and abuse them? While I am sure that there are plenty of functional BDSM-inclined relationships today, the *Fifty Shades* interpretation was an incredibly poor one, a media sensation which has already rippled through the entire world and set off various related *crimes* (i.e.

University of Illinois, Chicago¹). My concern is in regards to what might happen if societies around the globe continue to feast upon this type of treatment, of women or men and those who do not fit into such a gender binary. These dreadful acts have already proven successful in film, the box office nearly surpassing the record set by the *Passion of Christ*. Ironic, no? In summary, if I had to whisper “oh, that is *so* sad” and look away, hiding my tears in my boyfriend’s arm for the vast majority of the footage, I would not recommend this for anyone and would most certainly be wary of its looming backlash in society, considering what this teaches our younger generations about “romance.”

¹ <http://college.usatoday.com/2015/02/24/u-of-illinois-chicago-student-arrested-after-re-enacting-fifty-shades-of-grey-scene/>