

Insights
Into

Fifty
Shades
Deeper

A mini-book by
Brownell Landrum

INSIGHTS INTO FIFTY SHADES DEEPER

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About This Book

This book offers some of Brownell's thoughts about the Fifty Shades of Grey Series.

**Sometimes the most powerful messages
come wrapped in surprising packages.**

Everything Happens for a Reason

Many – if not most – people say that "everything happens for a reason." Of course, I wholeheartedly agree. In fact, it could be argued that I'm an expert on the topic, most specifically the reasons why things happen since I wrote the book on it. Literally. My book [Five Reasons Why Bad Things Happen: How to Turn Tragedies Into Triumph](#) explains these reasons.

So, it's fitting for me to start this book by talking about the "Why" of *Fifty Shades of Grey*.

Yes, it was titillating and controversial. Certainly that's part of the reason, though, as they say, there's "more to the story" than just that.

Yes, *Fifty* was also a compelling love story about a complex relationship. (And believe me, that topic will be explored from many perspectives in this book!) *Fifty* was also "in the right place at the right time, with the right message."

Now, let's take it to that "deeper" level. It also happened for "a reason." Yes, my dear readers, it happened to get that message across to the world, to take notice, to shake things up, to spark debate, to consider the world we're living in and how to change it. "Change it?" you ask? Change it so that we create a world of women craving "dark, dominant lovers?" Well, maybe. But I think it's more than that. A LOT more than that. What if someday an anthropologist in the future was able to follow some of the threads of global change back to those novels? "What kind of change?" you probe. Well, with any lesson, change can take the high road or the low road. That's what happens with the confluence of fate with free will. When a choice is posed in front of us, what do we do? The lesson is fated, the outcome up to us. It's the choice we have as individuals and a society. Whether we learn the lesson or not. Whether we take on its positive intent or, instead, miss the point and go down a less-pleasant path.

To quote from my children's book, *Sometimes I Wonder*, "We decide on our lessons, the paths we will take, awards we might go for and mistakes we might make."

Practical optimist that I am, (which means that I believe in a positive future – but it won't happen without a lot of focused intent and effort!), I think the "why" behind *Fifty* has the potential to bring us into the light. To use the author's own analogy, if there are fifty shades of gray, then that means we can move closer to the dark, or closer to the light. The direction is up to us!

Here's a relevant quote from my book, *A Chorus of Voices*, "Almost all religions talk about the contrast between good and evil, or light and dark energy. I tend to think it's not absolute, that there are shades of gray. The way I see it, dark energy is the absence

of love, just as black is the absence of color. The more love, the more colors added to the palette, the more light is achieved."

So, maybe if we all look at this discussion from the point of view of love, we can "find the light" and delight in the nuanced colors together.

Go ahead. Make fun of me. I can handle it. While you're at it, here's another place where you can feel free to mock me. When I read *Fifty*, I was so obsessed with "why" about the characters that I wrote my own novel to explain them! I treated them as though they're real-life human beings making those kinds of life decisions. Why would someone choose to be born to a crack whore? What was the pre-destiny plan of Ana and Christian? And how could their "free will" decisions impact their life purpose?

Again, you can laugh. But what if...what if...there is a higher power that wanted the world (okay, 100 million readers might not be "the world," but it's darned close! And considering the Keynesian "ripple effect, it's not that much of a stretch!) to stand up and take notice. To consider the things I have considered myself.

If you're a fan of *Fifty*, this book might intrigue you. Heck, it might even give you some ammo to combat the 50h8rs. "See? I told you there's more to it than you thought!" or "You missed the point! Read it again!"

Or if you're a 50H8r, (*Fifty* Hater), you're probably scoffing, or at least mimicking Ana and rolling your eyes all over the place. Maybe you don't think things happen for a definable, higher reason. If so, I'm wondering why you've read this far... Hmmm...Or maybe you think things might happen for a reason - but don't know why or how? If you want help clarifying, check out the [Basic Assumptions on the www.ReasonsWhy.com website](http://www.ReasonsWhy.com). If you believe these, you're in the "Reasons Why Club."

Believer or skeptic, I hope this book will get you to think. Remember: being skeptical is just another form of fear. It takes courage to take a leap of faith and believe in something not-quite-proven. The only way to overcome that trepidation is to open your mind just a little bit...and keep reading!

Thanks!

The "Why" of Christian Grey

This is just a theory...and I'm sure some people will disagree, which is not only fine, it's great! Debate is healthy. And frankly we'd rather have people question and challenge our posts on this site than people who just passive accept what we have to say.

Let's start with this quote from Darker:

"Is that why you don't like to be touched?"

He closes his eyes and hugs me tighter. "That's complicated," he murmurs. He nuzzles me between my breasts, inhaling deeply, trying to distract me.

"Tell me," I prompt.

He sighs. "She didn't love me. I didn't love me. The only touch I knew was . . . harsh. It stemmed from there. Flynn explains it better than I can."

But here it is... my theory on the "why" of Christian Grey: I think Christian equated punishment with love. I wouldn't ever suggest that all people involved in his kind of behavior/lifestyle have the same subconscious motivation, because I doubt they do. I suspect there are a lot of complexities involved. But what I read into James' book is that Christian's having been neglected and abandoned by his birth mother affected his romantic relationships. For some people, and I'm saying for Christian, sometimes the only attention they get as children is negative attention. The result is that they end up doing things that prompt that reaction. Being punished is better than being ignored. In a (possibly perverse) way, it shows they care.

I'm not saying this continued with Carrick and Grace, because by all accounts they were infinitely patient and loving. But the pattern was set from infancy, and was perpetually demonstrated by his aversion to being touched. As a teenager, his built-up anger lashed out through fighting until he found the punishment and discipline he craved through Elena. From Ana's first-person account in the books, Elena is the villainous, insensitive child abuser. To Christian, she "loved him" in the only way he understood. To her, it might not have been love, but to him, at least subconsciously, it was.

Once Christian gets old enough, his wants and needs change. Maybe he realized Elena didn't love him. Certainly she didn't let him love her back, at least not how he defined love. So he switches the dynamic and becomes the dominant, the one who punishes. Yes, it's about control, and I'll go "deeper" into the control issue. But it's also more than that. If he didn't care, he wouldn't punish, would he? It kind of equates to the quote that the opposite of love isn't hate, it's indifference. If he didn't care for those other girls, he wouldn't have punished them, would he? He would've just walked. And, given their propensity to want to be the punishee, it worked out fabulously. To those of us on the outside looking into this dynamic, it might seem shallow and unfulfilling.

Like the following quote from one of my books, "Sex without love is like a meal without nutrition; neither satisfying nor sustaining."

I'd like to suggest that there was a form of love in these encounters. Sure, he exhibited some of the classic behaviors of abusers: punish, break the other person down, then suck them back in with tenderness. But, to him, and to his consenting adult partners, it was what they both wanted and needed.

James suggests that Christian was punishing his mother when he chose girls/women who looked like her. They're her books, after all, her vision, so only she can know her intent. I'd just like to offer that perhaps it wasn't to hurt or hate his mother, but, instead, to express love in the only form he knew.

Enter Anastasia, who created another shift in his life. I read an article where Dakota Johnson, the actress playing Ana in the movie, said something about how she felt like her character "broke down" Christian. I'd suggest rewording it to be that she "broke through" Christian. Let's look at the scene near the end of the first book, when they're in bed together after he's shown her how bad it can get, and she tells him, "I'm sure as hell I'm not going to let you do that to me again." He has a decision. He could've easily manipulated her. He could've promised that he'd never do it again, just to keep her, but he doesn't. Instead, he lets her go. Why? Not because he's a sadistic SOB. (Though that's probably how he sees himself). And not because he doesn't care about her. He does it because she won't let him love her in the only way he knows how.

What do you think about my theory?

Not a Hollywood Ending

Hollywood is always in search of that perfect "happily ever after" ending. One of the most interesting parodies of this was in the movie "The Player" with Tim Robbins. That satirical (and highly acclaimed) film showed fictional screenwriters arguing with the studio about the ending for their movie, stating emphatically that it had to end as written. No way would they allow the studio to change it to a typical Hollywood ending. What happened, of course, was that they all got sucked into what the audience wanted. Happily ever after.

The first book in the *Fifty* series didn't fit that mold. Ana left. Walked out. Severed ties. As a reader, the pain, both physical and emotional, was palpable. We wanted a happy ending! Yet it had a much longer-lasting effect on us because it wasn't.

I didn't have the luxury of being an early adopter for James' books, so I didn't get a chance to read the ending as an ending. By the time I read them, I knew there was a series. So I knew there was...more...which offered a glimmer of hope that things might work out for the characters I'd invested time into. Yet I wonder: How would I have felt if I thought the ending of the first book was the actual ending?

Other than craving another book that'd give me the answers and satisfaction I was looking for, I suppose I would've also felt slightly bereft, like the feeling you have when relationships don't work out, even though you've tried your best and given your all.

The emotional impact would've been stronger. Longer-lasting.

In one of my other lives, I'm the founder for a training company and an editor for the leading training magazine. I wrote an article about the impact of emotions on learning, and the findings are fascinating. Basically, the more emotions involved, the stronger the learning impact. Fun enhances engagement and learning. Pain gets our attention. Fear makes us more alert. So does uncertainty. (See the chapter on the Pain/Pleasure/Fear Dynamic).

Have you ever been listening to a song and it gets cut off before it's finished playing, and your brain keep replaying the song? It's stuck in your head, and won't get out until it's resolved. The same is true for an ending left "in the balance." It makes us uncomfortable, which is why audiences vote to change those kinds of endings into one more predictably satisfying. But you know what happens? Yep - it's finished! But not *Fifty*. Not the first book.

So...what do you think? How'd you feel when you read the first book in the *Fifty* series? Didn't it feel different than perhaps some other, more predictable stories?

Pain/Pleasure/Fear

Your heart pounds. Your breathing accelerates. Sweat mists your body. All your nerves are on alert.

Are you aroused – or terrified?

Your body tenses, unsure of its reaction to the onslaught of feelings. You cry out with the sudden, overwhelming sensation.

Are you being punished – or pleased?

Tears are streaming down your face.

Are you sad – or scared? Relieved – or overjoyed?

The physiological response to fear and pain is achingly similar to sexual desire, isn't it?

Consider the boring, predictable sex lives of many women. "Will I finish before he does?" "Did I remember to turn the alarm on?" "Why didn't he take out the garbage as I asked?" These are often the kinds of thoughts going through a woman's mind as she's trying to "get in the mood."

You don't need to be an expert in sexuality to know that the most important organ in sexual satisfaction is the brain, and distracting thoughts can definitely kill the mood.

Enter Christian Grey. Gorgeous, complex, tortured, mercurial Christian. Every woman who encounters him can feel the attraction, drawn as much to his perfect physique as his commanding presence. The man is dangerous, as much to the heart as to the potential of a reddened rear-end.

True, the excitement of the unknown at the beginning of any relationship is what keeps our senses on high alert. What a character in my books calls "Disney Chemicals." That euphoric feeling that makes you want to throw your hands out and sing.

As a woman who's read her share of typical romantic novels, most are lovely and enjoyable, they're just not all that erotic. Why? Because safe and secure can go from complacent to no more surprises to lackluster to humdrum. Which is why most romantic novels end at the proposal, or shortly thereafter, with a possible epilogue about the future children the couple has. (For a deeper discussion of what makes something erotic, see the chapter on Love, Eros & Sex.)

It's scary to be vulnerable; to reveal yourself. Yet that's what's required to cultivate Eros. To be erotic.

There's a fascinating TED video that discusses the connection between pain and pleasure in women in the Cortex. To view, go here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hpc2NjUAtoY> .

There's another one looks at emotional and physical pain:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lGglw8eAikY> .

Fifty allowed us to explore our own limits to pain – both physical and emotional. My book, *Five Reasons Why Bad Things Happen* explains that sometimes painful experiences can be the most rewarding. There are stories after stories about people who've been through a traumatic experience who say it was "the best thing that ever happened" to them. One example is María Belón, the woman portrayed by Naomi Watts in the film "The Impossible." Belón was critically wounded in the 2004 tsunami, and is quoted as saying, "The tsunami was an incredible gift. I embrace life. My whole life is extra time. My whole story is on my body. And it is wonderful because it means I am alive."

Fear is exciting. It makes us more alert. Pain gets us to wake up and take notice. It helps us test our limits and explore the contrasts.

We can't think about the laundry when we're trepid in the here-and-now. We forget about the alarm clock when alarms are ringing inside our own heads.

And we can't worry about our jobs or mortgages when we're reading about a sensual relationships exploring the proverbial dark night of the soul. Our own as well as the characters'. (Interestingly, the poem, *Dark Night of the Soul* is about "the painful experience that people endure as they seek to grow in spiritual maturity and union with God.") Even in religion, pain can be a prerequisite to achieving bliss.

A verse from my children's book, *Sometimes I Wonder*, suggests, "For life isn't easy, and not always fun. But easy is boring, like games always won."

Yes, easy is boring. Predictability is tedious. As the following Einstein quote (repeated by Paige in my book *The Song Begins*) reflects, "Human beings must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it."

Action. Excitement. And yes, perhaps a little pain and fear to mix things up. To enhance the pleasure, as much by contrast as by its heightening the experience. To keep life from getting boring.

Fifty Shades came along at a time in history where people were facing a number of fears. The most notable of which were the uncertain, frightening economy combined with the (perhaps unconscious) fear of boredom and complacency.

Fifty allowed us to consider that perhaps even the most successful people might have serious, deep insecurities. The proverbial grass isn't always greener. You can have it all, yet still be missing the most elemental factors of happiness.

And it also pulled us out of our predictable ruts. Love *Fifty* or hate it, it still got you to *feel* something. Whether it was to fight against an aspect that bothered you, got you to appreciate what you have, or encouraged you explore another lifestyle, was up to your own individual experience. But it did something.

Sure, I have friends who didn't like *Fifty*. I'm sure we all do. I'm certainly not saying it was for everyone.

But I am suggesting that these readers might want to consider that there might be something...deeper. Of the friends I have who didn't like *Fifty* at first, until they checked out one of my books or joined the Fifty Shades Deeper group, I got them to reconsider their views on the characters, their motivations, their history, their deeper, more meaningful soul connection. The purpose behind the pain – not only in the lives of these fictional, yet in many ways very real characters, but also in our own lives.

Love, Eros and Sex

What makes a book – or relationship – erotic? What is Eros?

Let's start the explanation with the following excerpt from with one of my favorite characters, Goo, in my book, DUET stories Volume III: *A Chorus of Voices*:

"Love is steady and everlasting and unlimited. Sex is physical. Eros is what makes it all exciting! It's the force that compels you to be together, what makes your heart beat rapidly. It's what makes you long to unite with the other person."

"Attraction," I added.

"Yes. And more! At least with the right person. If Eros isn't combined with love, if sex doesn't connect with the soul, the flame of passion will die out."

"So how is Eros cultivated?" I asked, now captivated.

"It comes from the search for adventure, the excitement in getting to know the mysteries of the other person."

Eros, as you may know, is a character from Greek mythology, the story of Eros and Psyche. Some translations call him "Cupid" instead of Eros. Google it. Check out Wikipedia. There are over 23 million references to Eros online. The story of Eros and Psyche is a clever one. A book by Robert A. Johnson called *She* delves into the parallels of the myth Psyche and today's modern woman.

What you'll find is that Eros, though called the God of Love, had characteristics that distinguished him from love: creativity, discovery, inspiration, mystery, intrigue, excitement and passion. A sense of adventure.

There is a lecture on *The Forces of Love, Eros and Sex* in the Pathwork.Org website. [To read this full article click here.](#) Or go to www.Pathwork.org for this and other fascinating and highly recommended articles. Here are some quotes:

"The erotic force is one of the most potent forces in existence and has tremendous momentum and impact."

And

"Eros...lifts the soul out of sluggishness, out of mere contentment and vegetation. It causes the soul to surge, to go out of itself..."

The article goes further to say, "When Eros is missing, the sexual relationship must eventually suffer. This is the problem with most marriages. There is hardly a human being who is not puzzled by the question of what to do to maintain the spark in the

relationship which seems to evaporate the more habit and familiarity with one another sets in."

So... what does this all have to do with the phenomenon of *Fifty Shades of Grey*? The answer is to explore "deeper" (sorry, I couldn't help myself) into what made the books "erotic."

First, the books are about all three forces: Love, Sex and Eros. If it was just Eros, it's less likely the books would've been such a phenomenon. They are, at their very foundation, a story about love expressed through sexual exploration. That's what kept it from being sleazy or salacious and, instead, made it real, understandable, acceptable.

One of the things that made the books spicy was the way James got us to creep out of our comfort zones and explore our own sexual limits. How far would we go? How adventurous would we be, in the pursuit of pleasure? To please the one we love?

In the contract Christian presents, he outlines hard and soft limits. For an inexperienced virgin, it's all new and different to Ana, so her perspective is different from the rest of us. But I suspect that for a majority of readers, the list in the book still made us wonder: Would I? Could I? Should I?

Ana's inexperience weighed against Christian's intimate knowledge of female anatomy also added to the erotic element. Her uncertainty and, yes, fear, added to her arousal. (See the chapter on the pain/pleasure/fear dynamic).

According to Pathwork, "Eros hits with sudden force, often taking a person unaware and even unwilling to go through the experience."

This trepidation waged an internal battle inside Ana, fighting against her desire to know him better. To touch him, not just literally but also in a more profound, emotional and I propose, even spiritual way. Ultimately, to get what she wanted, she had to open herself up, to move past the fear and trust. To give herself over completely. To submit to the dominant.

Remember the scene in the movie *Jerry Maguire* when he's taken her home and they're standing outside her front door? When she just stands there as he makes all the moves? I don't know about you, but to me that was out of the norm of my experience. Since when does one party completely allow the other to take over? If I'm attracted to someone, I want to touch, to kiss, to give back. Are you the same way? But then...can you really, fully receive when you're giving at the same time? Hmm...

So...perhaps the "B" in BDSM doesn't have to be literal. Maybe the restraints are just used so you can free yourself emotionally? To put you into pure "receiving" mode? In

my novels, I have a scene where my characters play with bondage for this very reason. So one party can be totally focused on the other, while their partner has no choice but to receive. Though it is about control and, yes, dominance, the scene has nothing to do with aggression at all.

And it's still erotic.

Let's go back to the characteristics of Eros above: creativity, discovery, inspiration, mystery, intrigue, excitement and passion. A sense of adventure.

Yes. Ana's journey was all of these, and we "rode" (sorry, couldn't miss the pun) along with her.

Thus you can see how important the erotic force is. Here's another relevant Pathwork quote: "Without the erotic force hitting them and getting them out of their rut, many human beings would never be ready for a more conscious search for the breaking down of their own walls of separation."

Though Christian was defined as the "dominant" in the relationship, didn't Ana ultimately break down his "walls of separation" as much, if not more, than he did hers? (See the chapter on "The Why of Christian Grey.") Wasn't that what made their relationship as "erotic" to him as it was to her? As he was opening up a whole new world to her body, wasn't she opening up his spirit?

What can all of us learn from *Fifty*, to make our own lives more passionate, creative, mysterious and exciting? Not just sexually, not just in our relationships, but also throughout the rest of our lives?

"The main element in the erotic force...is the adventure, the search for the knowledge of the other soul." - Pathwork

Sylvia Day, in her first Crossfire book, *Bared to You*, gives us a hint, "Every day, I need you to tell me something I don't know about you. Something insightful, no matter how small." In the beginning of a relationship, it's easy. All new and exciting. Fantasy "fills in the blanks" for the things we don't know about our partner.

But over time, when predictability sets in, what's the solution? As one of the characters in my book *A Chorus of Voices* suggests, "The secret is to keep yourself interesting." To get out of our comfort zones and try something new that challenges and reinvigorates us.

"Eros strengthens the curiosity to know the other being. As long as there is something new to find in the other soul and as long as you reveal yourself, eros will live." *Fifty*, I believe, did that for a lot of people. We learned something new... about ourselves.

Some souls (including some of the 50h8rs) may not be ready. As Pathwork suggests, "...the over-fearful coward will have to make up for trying to cheat life by hiding from eros and thus withholding from the soul a medicine, valuable if used properly. Most people in this category have a vulnerable point somewhere in their soul through which eros can enter. There are also a few who have built such a tight wall of fear and pride around their souls that they avoid this part of life experience entirely and so shortchange their own development."

Yes, for many people the discovery in 50, the adventure, might have been cloaked in the fantasy, the superficial draw of the character's extreme wealth, power and beauty. Sure, it's exciting to date your first billionaire, to see your first flawlessly physically perfect human in all their glory, to take your first flight in a sailplane, your first sail on a yacht, your first time on a private plane, your first first-class charity gala. I've done them all, and can agree: it's exciting. Just like most "firsts."

But also like most experiences, the novelty wears off pretty quickly. You loved your new car at first, right? How long did that high last? Until its first scratch? Or the newer model comes out?

The following quote from my *Very Special Epilogue* offers a suggestion:

"One of the biggest lessons people on Earth have...(is) the false belief that looks, money and power are requirements for love, when it's the opposite."

"You don't mean that people with those things can't find true love, do you?"

"No. Of course not. If they're ready for it."

"But?"

"But it's only when someone really shows their vulnerability to another, and is accepted, flaws and all, can he or she really feel loved."

- from *A Very Special Epilogue to DUET stories Volume III: A Chorus of Voices*

It is then, dear readers, when Eros truly begins.

"There is no limit, for the soul is endless and eternal: a whole lifetime would not suffice to know it. There can never be a point when you know the other soul entirely, nor when you are known entirely. The soul is alive, and nothing that is alive remains static. It has the capacity to reveal even deeper layers that already exist."

- Pathwork lecture

Yes, deeper.

Soulmates?

To start a chapter on Soulmates, let's first define the term. Many people think a soulmate is a one-and-only-for-all-time mate, a twin flame, a perfect union, the other half of ourselves, our perfect counterpoint.

That's not how I see it. In all of my books, both fiction and nonfiction, I define a soulmate as "someone you were destined to meet." It could be for a reason, a season or a lifetime. Yes, it's someone significant. The following quote from author Richard Bach is one of the best I've found: "A perfect relationship, I think, is one that delivers the lessons we have chosen to learn. Likely it won't always meet our definition of 'bliss.' Likely it will include the toughest, most difficult lessons two people can teach other, lessons they would never abide from any other soul. But we humans are brilliant at choosing, with unerring precision, exactly the partners we need to learn what we must."

So, taking these definitions into account, let's consider the characters in *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Are Anastasia and Christian soulmates?

I hear the chuckles now. *Really, Brownell?* Go ahead. I love laughter, even if it's at my expense! But if you'd give me a chance and keep reading...

Before I continue, I'll reiterate the purpose of this book...that there's a "higher purpose" in the immense popularity of *Fifty*. Something we can learn from to improve our lives.

The following quote from my children's book, *Sometimes I Wonder*, elucidates my view of how we plan our lives:

"We decide on our lessons, the paths we will take,
Awards we might go for, and mistakes we might make."

What this means is that destiny is the confluence of fate (the path we plan before birth) and free will (the decisions we make once we're here). We can make mistakes.

"You know there are no rights and wrongs. Just lessons, lessons and more lessons. With, hopefully a little fun in-between." (from *A Very Special Epilogue*.)

So... back to Ana and Christian. If we used the "romantic" definition of soulmate, she wouldn't have left, would she? Everything would've been happily-ever-after from the get-go. Not only would that have been a rather hum-drum story to read, it wouldn't have been realistic or relatable. The power of the story was the way it fits Bach's description above.

The characters were both drawn to each other and terrified of that draw. Isn't that true for all of us when we're faced with a life-altering change? It's scary! Some of us run away from such dramatic transformation, yet change still follows us, doesn't it? That's because we're here for a reason, for something to learn, and until we learn the lesson, we'll have to take the class over and over again until we pass!

So...what were Ana and Christian's lessons? And how did their unique relationship precipitate the learning?

Christian, control freak that he was, thought he could dominate Ana, whether through his sex appeal, financial resources, professional power or through physical "training" (punishment/reward/punishment). But other than the sexual connection, Ana never seemed very impressed with any of these other characteristics, and the latter both confused and repelled her. Even the mind-blowing sex wasn't enough to control her, to keep her. She wanted one thing he couldn't give her. Love. To touch him. To reach into the opening of his soul.

But he couldn't love her. (See the chapter on *The "Why" of Christian Grey*). Not in the way he wanted. The only way he knew. What then? The only way he could love her was if he could accept that she could love him. The real him. The tortured, wounded, soul that felt unworthy of love.

And what were Ana's lessons? The following quote (from one of my books) explains how she felt when she tried to love him, "Loving someone who can't love themselves is like pouring water into a bowl with a hole in the bottom. It can never stay filled."

Once Ana realized this, she left. She recognized her own limits. And it goes much "deeper" than just the fact that she couldn't handle the physical pain. Even James says the pain was "physical, mental...metaphysical." The more profound pain she felt was that she realized he could never accept her pure, sincere love.

For the reader, the lessons in the story are plentiful. We all have to recognize and know our own limits. Know when to walk away. When to "fold 'em" as the song goes. When to detach.

It wasn't that she stopped loving him. She just realized that loving him wasn't enough. The following quote, from author/speaker/spiritual advisor Anthony de Mello, might provide some insight, "Grief is a sign that I made my happiness depend on this thing or person."

Yes, she felt grief. And loss. And pain. That's what made her detachment that much more powerful.

Christian's lessons were even more profound. Even though the books were written from Ana's perspective, we still can recognize the immense impact she made, the power she had over him.

Discussion:

- If the story had ended after the first book, would she have still been his "soulmate?"
- If Ana had stayed, how might their relationship have progressed...or deteriorated?
- What other lessons did Ana learn? How about Christian's lessons?

In The Stars?

Disclaimer: Let me clarify and say that I'm not an expert in Astrology. So...if you are, your comments are welcome! And, no, I didn't do either character's full chart, so I don't know their rising signs or any other components. So this is a bit of a simplification. Sorry if that bothers anyone!]

Are you a *Fifty* fan who also follows Astrology? Did you know, as soon as E.L. James mentions that Christian is "mercurial," with multiple (50) personalities, that it sounded like he must be a Gemini?

How about Ana's highly organized, cautious, yet incurably romantic tendencies? Pure Virgo, right?

Want to go even...deeper? Let's look at Goldschneider and Elffers' *The Secret Language of Birthdays* for the exact dates James uses as the characters' birthdays:

June 18 (Christian) is called "The Day of Financial Security." Seriously. I'm not making this up. "Strengths: Lively, Money-wise, Influential. Weaknesses: Manipulative, Erratic, Restless."

"Those born on June 18 are playful and love to have fun... yet they have nasty tempers... deal quite hastily with wrongdoers." (It's in the book - I promise!) Here's more: "They like being at the top..." (We know what that means... *wink*) "...and require large doses of admiration." (No problem there!) The authors suggest that June 18 people should "cultivate more modesty and humility." Also, "...they are not to be crossed." The good news is that "June 18 people are usually faithful to their mates, family and friends" but "they can be both manipulative and erratic." "Because they get bored easily, they are constantly looking for excitement and change." Loyal and yet craving excitement! Explains his monogamous nature. No wonder we're drawn to him!

September 10 (Anastasia): "The Day of Private Goals." Makes sense. Ana is/was very private! "Those born on September 10 are taken up with tradition." (yep). "Excelling in what they do, but without drawing undue attention to themselves." They "offer great peace and security to any prospective partner..." Yet "their passions are not so controlled...often...swept away."

"Drawn to unusual and interesting people." (She could've never been happy with Jose, could she?" "...can experience anxiety... prefer to be the mate of a more unusual personality who is the focus of their attention while they work behind the scenes to ensure success." Strengths include being "Capable, Pragmatic and Reliable." Weaknesses? "Frustrated (not sure about that one), Anxious and Excitable."

So...what about a Gemini and a Virgo together? I consulted two sources: The Secret Language of Relationships (also by Goldschneider and Elffers) and Linda Goodman's "Love Signs."

Goldschneider and Elffers suggest the following characteristics of the September 10 - June 18 relationship, what they call "The Eternal Student."

The positive traits of This Relationship include Conversational, Intelligent and Educational. (True enough). The not-so-Positive traits are Argumentative, Impatient and Non-emotional. (The first two fit; not sure about the third, although both Christian and Ana try to avoid negative emotions).

According to these astrologers, the "Week of the Seeker-Week of the Enigma relationship is likely to focus on the mental plane." Certainly, both Ana and Christian are highly intelligent and appreciate knowledge. "Areas of study or interest in the humanities, perhaps in art, history, sociology or politics, are attractive to this pair."

"Those born during the Week of the Seeker are intensely physical individuals, but they often try to overcome earthly limitations to find what lies beyond, and it is in this more metaphysical area that their relationship with Week of the Enigma people may reach fruition." However, "These two are unlikely to achieve deep union in the emotional and intuitive sphere, since neither will have enough patience or interest to delve deeply into the other's personality." (Thankfully, this wasn't true!)

To read the rest, check out The Secret Language of Relationships, or their website, www.theseconlanguage.com.

Now here's some advice from Linda Goodman's Love Signs. As you read...remember that these are statements about all Virgos and Geminis...not by actual birth *date*. As June 18 is Christian's birthday, he's not as flighty as many other Geminis

"(Virgos) should get it out in the open more often, talk about it, express themselves." Isn't that what Christian kept saying to Ana? "The Virgo intellect is as sharp as Gemini's but not as vacillating and changeable." True! Ana was pretty steadfast!

"It must be admitted that the average Virgo man or woman does not practice provoking trouble, and does not usually respond to it quickly either, unlike the Geminis, with their constant stirring up of a tempest from a single breath of choppy air, and frequently reacting in hurricane fashion to what seems to them to be constant, critical carping and harping from Virgo." Yes - Goodman actually uses the word "harping!"

"In any dispute between Gemini and Virgo, Gemini will nearly always win the main point, being faster on the draw and quicker with the cinching retort." "There is an appealing magical quality in Gemini that attracts and excites the more timid Virgins, and this could create enough mystery to make the relationship permanently intriguing."

About the Virgo Woman/Gemini Man combination:

"When they first fall in love, often through mutual curiosity... (the Gemini man) be will be flattered with (the Virgo woman's) rapt attention, her alert mind, and her very feminine manner."

"There are indisputably subtle differences in their approaches to the physical chemistry of love. She wants to know he is there. Not just his mind, heart and soul – all of him. This girl feels more confident and relaxed, and therefore can be a more satisfactory love partner, if she feels some degree of security and familiarity in their intimate relationship. This is not always possible with a Gemini, who is, lest we forget, two-people-in-one (sometimes three or four) and changeable enough to project desire one night and cool disinterest the next. Such behavior can throw a Virgo girl into a trauma of quiet desperation, causing her to blame some defect in herself as the reason for the change in his ardor."

See the parallels?

Now...what do you think about all of this?

Anastasia, Ana and Her "Selves"

A recurring theme in E.L. James' books are Ana and her multiple "selves," whether she's referring to her "inner goddess" or sometimes "snarky" subconscious. Not only do these competing personas offer useful writing devices that allow the protagonist to explore her own behavior and motivations, they also hint at a "deeper" meaning.

While these different "selves" may not be an exact representation of the more traditional psychological terminology, they do give us something to compare. Jung called them the conscious, subconscious and superconscious. Freud used id, ego and superego. More contemporary philosophies use the terms inner self, outer self and higher self or, more simply, mind, body, spirit.

My book, *Five Reasons Why Bad Things Happen* delves deeply into these "selves." The selves can be best described as follows. Let's start by assuming you have a soul, an immortal part of yourself that is connected to the Divine; the part that existed before you were born and will continue after you die. This is your superconscious or higher self. When that "self" decides to come to Earth, it chooses a body. This body is your subconscious or Inner Self. When combined, they become your conscious self or "mind." What you know as "you." Each of these three selves has a different perspective, and, often, a different motivation. (Again, if you don't agree with this definition, I'm happy to debate!)

Now let's move to a more obscure, yet in many ways more relevant approach that's used by the Huna religion. In this Hawaiian-based faith (which you might recognize by the term "the big kahuna"), popularized by Max Freedom Long, the three selves are separated into the unhipili (subconscious, inner, emotional, intuitive), uhane (waking consciousness, rational) and aumakua (super-conscious, connection with the divine).

Here's a spoiler: one of the "Five Reasons Why Bad Things Happen" is Subconscious Sabotage. The things our subconscious (body self) does that can get in the way and often cause bad things to happen. Here's an example. I had a friend who was a workaholic, and was planning to work throughout a three-day holiday weekend. Her subconscious (body) was ticked off. "She" wanted to do something fun! Work is no fun! So, what happened? My friend twisted her ankle and was forced to lie in bed all weekend! Not only does this example help us understand how we can (both literally and figuratively) "trip ourselves up," it also suggests that while the subconscious isn't always rational, he or she will always get our attention!

A solution I propose in my book is one recommended by Huna is to separate the selves, even going so far as to have a distinct name for your subconscious and your higher self (superconscious). I've spoken with psychologists and psychiatrists about this, and they

agree that making this distinction and having separate identities can be a quite valuable tool toward self-discovery.

Back to *Fifty*. Ana's ability to recognize, identify and separate these different parts of herself, the subconscious and the inner goddess, (plus the occasional use of her full formal name, Anastasia, versus the more casual Ana), helps us understand and relate to the character from multiple points of view. And it helps her through her voyage of self-discovery.

Ana's subconscious is sometimes a friend or advisor, spurring her on or giving her confidence, sometimes an inner critic, judging her actions, and sometimes a whiner or troublemaker. Most of us have these kinds of warring thoughts in our heads, making us feel conflicted and sometimes guilty. However, when we consider the source and are able to separate that part of ourselves from the conscious, rational self, as James does with Ana, we can, as Ana puts it "slap her down" when he/she is not serving our highest good. Very healthy, psychologically!

The inner goddess, of course, is the sexual, sensual part of Anastasia that had been suppressed her whole life – until she meets Christian, that is! While this "self" isn't officially one of the "three" above, it is an important "voice," not only for the books, but also one that most of us could benefit by "befriending." Often, sex is complicated by guilt, insecurity and social or religious expectations or limitations, when (in my opinion) it should be celebrated as something beautiful and natural – and even spiritual! Ana's recognition of this part of herself serves multiple benefits. First, it allows us to relate to her. "She" is anxious and unsure of herself, but her "inner goddess" is eager, confident and celebrates her sexuality. Good for her! And for us (the reader).

What do you think? Do you ever recognize an "inner voice," whether it's your body/subconscious or any other aspect of yourself? How did you feel about Ana's "Inner Goddess?" And, finally, do you think Christian has a similar inner voice? If not, how do you think his exploring the "hidden" parts of himself would help him, both as a character and as a man?

What We Can All Learn – Part 1

Fifty Shades initiated us into a lifestyle many of us knew little about. BDSM.

According to Wikipedia, “BDSM is a variety of erotic practices involving dominance and submission, role-playing, restraint, and other interpersonal dynamics. The origin of the term BDSM is unclear and is believed to have been formed either from joining the term B&D (bondage and discipline) with S&M (somasochism or sadism and masochism), or as a compound initialism from B&D, D&S (dominance and submission), and S&M.

I got curious, so I started doing a little research on the lifestyle and practices of BDSM and found there are a lot of factors we can all learn from.

Before I go any further, however, let me offer a comment and a disclaimer. First, this book is not recommending everyone go out and join in a fully immersed BDSM lifestyle. If it's for you – great! I hope you're living it honestly, healthily and happily.

Secondly, I have seen a number of articles complaining that the way *Fifty Shades* described Christian Grey might not have been representative of the lifestyle. I'm not an expert, either. Far, far, far (far!) from it. I'm just a very inquisitive, open-minded individual wanting to learn about people – all kinds of people! So forgive me in advance if anything I say here is not in keeping with something anyone else believes in. Respectful debate is always welcome – or you can certainly opt-out of reading entirely!

I tweeted the following self-reflection the other day that should provide some insight into who I am: “I like being wrong. I know that sounds weird, but it’s true. When I think I know something and get proven wrong it opens up a new world.”

I'm not sure I had any opinion of BDSM before *Fifty*, to be honest, but once the books allowed me to take a peek inside, I was intrigued. And saw that many things people might assume are not true. For example, abuse of any kind – physical or emotional – is staunchly, adamantly not tolerated in BDSM relationships.

I expect that, just as with non-BDSM relationships, there are probably as many different interpretations on the lifestyle as there are people engaging in it! So, I'm sure everything below will not apply to every BDSM relationship.

Okay – enough disclaimers! What did I learn, from an "outsider" point of view, about this lifestyle – both within *Fifty Shades* and through numerous other sources – that's some wisdom we can all learn from?

Openly Discussing Interests and Limits Up Front

Those practicing the BDSM lifestyle openly understand and accept that each of us has limits to what we both will like and accept in a relationship – sexual and otherwise. And while that also may be true with non-BDSM relationships, I think the BDSM world has a "leg up" on the rest of "us." E.L. James provides a basic list with yes/no answers in *Fifty*, but there is a very detailed checklist used in BDSM that is not only eye-opening but inspiring as well. Listing a wide variety of activities, it asks each participant to answer these questions:

The first answer should be, if you've ever tried that activity before

Yes = I have participated in this activity before

No = I have not participated in this activity before

The second answer should be your interest in engaging in that activity on a scale of 0 – 5, NO,?, +, ! or a combination.

0 = I have no interest/don't like this, but would do it to please you.

1 = Not very interesting/don't really enjoy this too much.

2 = This is OK,

3 = This is nice/fun/interesting

4 = I really enjoy/think I'll enjoy this activity

5 = I LOVE THIS/CAN'T WAIT TO TRY THIS

NO = Hard limit. I will not participate in this activity at all, at this time.

? = Unfamiliar with this activity.

+ = I'm scared of this but would possibly like to explore it.

! = I'm embarrassed to admit I like this.

Isn't this fabulous? Yes, it can apply to "fringe" sexual activities, but it could also relate to roller coasters, sushi or places to travel! (And, for those dirty minds out there, yes, I see the puns in my examples. LOL). Seriously, though, this list is so powerful! Isn't one of the problems in "traditional" relationships that the magic, the Eros has gone? (See the chapter on *Love, Eros & Sex*). Trying something new is a great way to spark things up! But so many of us are afraid to broach the subject. This list does it for us! You can Google BDSM checklist yourself.

Safety

Even with the limits defined, and even with Christian's desire to inflict pain with the pleasure, safety was fiercely important to him. In fact, the word "safety" is used 11 times in the contract. Ensuring safety was so crucial to Christian, the character, for a number of reasons (his abhorrence to being touched, his residual childhood fears, his desire to protect and cherish Ana, etc.). And, as we read from Ana's point of view, we can more easily see how she was able to "let him in" (so to speak!) Seriously, though, we walked that line with the paradox she was facing between "why does he want to hit

me?" versus his obsession with her safety. As the story progresses, we learn more about both of his compulsions, and see the "deeper" purpose of their relationship.

In everything I've learned about other BDSM relationships, safety is just as important. Yes, I'm sure there are creeps in this lifestyle, just as there are in every other walk of life. But this group understands safety in a way that many of us "outsiders" can – and should – appreciate.

And safety goes beyond just making sure no one is pushed beyond his or her limits. There's an innate nurturing that goes along with ensuring someone else's safety. As I suggest in the chapter about *The Why of Christian Grey*, it gives him an opportunity to protect and nurture another human being in a way he couldn't have otherwise.

Safe Words

In *Fifty*, Christian implores Ana to use a safe word, which is a common practice in BDSM. And I think should be in ALL relationships – and not just for sexual situations! Something we can say – safely – to break the tension, to regroup, to stop the behavior.

In my first DUET stories novel, my characters Paige and Griffin get in their first serious argument. They've let animosity build, holding things back, until they respond with both anger and passive-aggressive actions. Yet they are falling in love and want to work things out. What to do? Here's a quote – and a solution – from my book:

Griffin offers an intriguing suggestion to help us communicate when we're angry – to use a safe word. "Like they do in S&M" he suggests. "When things are going too far." "What kind of word?" I inquire.

"Anything, I guess."

I look around and see a bowl of fruit. "How about banana?" I innocently suggest, inadvertently making Griffin snicker.

"Like banana hammock?" he counters, and we both laugh loudly.

"That's not what I was thinking," I reply. "I might have to use that one when I'm really angry." The laughter is liberating. And purifying. And unifying.

Contract

While apparently not all BDSM relationships go so far as to have a written contract, as Christian did, James' using the mechanism not only perfectly fit her mogul character, it also offered the Ana (and the reader) to have absolute clarity about his intentions from the get-go. While she was confused with the time limit, at least she had a framework to work around. How many of the rest of us spend inordinate amounts of time waiting for him or her to call, wondering when our next date would be? Not Ana! She knew exactly which hours of the week she'd be spending time with Christian. Yes, she did negotiate around it, which showed another factor of BDSM relationships, which is that

the contracts are never a one-way-street. Maybe one party is more dominant than the other, but in most of what I've read about BDSM, submissive does NOT mean inferior!

What We Can All Learn – Part 2

As explained in Part 1, this book is not intended to suggest everyone go join in the full BDSM lifestyle all the way. Not unless it's your "thing." If it is, I say, be happy, be honest and be healthy and enjoy yourself!

If not, here are more things we can all learn from the (healthy) BDSM lifestyle, which includes forms of bondage, dominance/submission, masochism and sadism. Regarding the masochism and sadism part, I'll state right here that any form of abuse – verbal or emotional is totally, 100% unacceptable. Zero lenience here. Thankfully, in everything I've read from the experts in this lifestyle, it's 100% unacceptable to them, too! (Maybe even more so than non-BDSMers!) So we're only talking about healthy BDSM relationships here.

Yes, a little bit of pain, within prescribed tolerances and no lasting marks, safely administered with two 100% consenting adults can't be fun. (See the chapter on *Pain, Pleasure and Fear*). And erotic. (See the chapter on *Love, Eros and Sex*). Now that that part is over, let's move on to more things we can learn from this lifestyle introduced to many of us in *Fifty*.

Testing Limits

In Part 1, one of the things shared was how openly BDSM partners are about clearly stating each participant's limits and interests – what each wants and will or will not do, primarily in the bedroom. (Though, to be honest, why not set other limits as well? Hmm...) But limits can change, and perhaps even should be tested...a little.

I'll bet many of us didn't like beets when we were younger, but now order them all the time? Okay, maybe that's just me. But most of us have some things that we're now glad someone talked us into trying. So, testing limits can be a good thing. It can also most definitely increase the eroticism in a relationship.

Some of you may be saying, "I test limits with my mate all the time!" I suppose all couples do. But what I've learned from BDSM is that this is an expected part of the relationship, and usually (and certainly supposed to be) discussed beforehand in a healthy, honest way.

In *Fifty*, Christian set limits that Ana tested all the time, from his always ordering her meals to what degree and kinds of pain were and were not acceptable to her. In the first book, Christian was 100% clear that it was his way or the highway. If, once they agreed on the contract, Ana were to leave him there'd be no coming back. It would be over. As we know from the ending in the first book, Ana understood that, which made it not only more difficult for her to leave, but decidedly permanent. (She returned the stuff, remember? Car and everything?)

In the second book, Christian changes. He has to redefine his own limits. As discussed in the chapter on *The Why of Christian Grey*, her not accepting his "lifestyle," the only way he knew how to love her, shook him to his core. If he was going to be with her, he had to change. Significantly. They had to not only redefine their limits, they had to test each and every one along the way to be sure one or the other wasn't going to leave.

Trust

Trust is important in any relationship. No question. But trust when you're tied up and the other person might have a flogger or other device that could, if not careful, could really, really hurt? Crucial. Could be life-or-death crucial. Or at least feel like it.

In the exchange of control or power (see below) in the D/s relationship, one party has to trust that the other will take care of him or her, while the dominant party has to trust in that trust.

Here's a quote from someone happy in a D/s relationship, from the submissive's point of view, "There is nothing better on this earth than the bond and trust between Dom and sub. Just to think that I totally surrender my body mind and soul to Him."

How can a submissive surrender like that? Consider this quote from the dominant's perspective, "A true Dominant feels what Our submissive feels. We cry when she cries.... We laugh when she laughs and are pleased by her pleasure."

Here's a quote offering advice for being a part of this lifestyle, indicating how critical it is to BE someone who is trustworthy! "The more empathy you have, the better you'll be at this. If you can, experience something yourself before you do it to another person."

In non BDSM relationships, trust is also extremely important. But you don't need me to tell you that. The thing non-BDSM couples can learn is - how far will you trust? How much? In what situations? Would you trust your partner to make all your decisions for you? (Before you say, "Are you crazy?" stay with me.) If your partner said, "Yes" to this question, do you feel like you could take on that responsibility? Wow. Makes you think, doesn't it? It may be as big of a deal to receive someone's trust as it is to give it.

I suppose most of us might not have the courage to do that permanently. But perhaps it would be interesting to try it, like maybe one day a month, to exchange that trust?

Ana had to trust Christian in a whole host of ways, from sexual situations to living in his place to flying in a sailplane to all kinds of other new adventures. Would you trust your partner in the same way?

I'll share a personal story here. One that I'm not particularly proud of. Many years ago I dated a guy who had been a ski instructor in Aspen before we met (in a totally unrelated scenario, in Tennessee.) One weekend we went skiing together in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. If you're a skier, I don't have to tell you the vast difference between Aspen and Gatlinburg in terrain difficulty and the requirements for being an instructor in one location versus the other.

Still, I couldn't trust him to give me pointers in my skiing - in Gatlinburg! And yes, I'd seen the photos of him doing very complicated flip/jumps in Colorado! Even his wearing his ski instructor outfit that day didn't convince me. Yes, I'm embarrassed now. So I hope this story at least makes its point about how difficult it can be to trust even the most trustworthy!

Clear Roles

The D/s relationship, in order for it to work, the roles are clear. Not all D/s relationships are alike, just like all non-BDSM relationships are alike, but in each (healthy) BDSM relationship the roles are clear. In *Fifty*, Christian could not have been more clear to Ana about who he expected would take the lead. Who would order meals, who would tie whom up, who would have control in the bedroom, etc. Even at the beginning of *Darker*, when he asks her to tell him every move he should make, he's still in control. She, however, was less clear. Sometimes she was passive, sometimes feisty. Sometimes confident while at other times afraid.

Not that readers blame her. She was also in love with him and so inexperienced and so willing to try, and he was so mercurial, changing constantly, that she not only had to figure out what she wanted and could tolerate, she had to figure him out as well! A constant *Dance of Intimacy*. (Good book by Harriet Lerner).

Control and Power Exchange

This is a biggie. A lot of this topic is covered above under *Trust*, but let me add a little more. Although I want to say all relationships are, in one way or another, about the exchange of control, I'll amend that and say in my experience most relationships, even healthy ones, are ones where at least a little (or at least occasionally) power and control can be either given or taken. One party often loves a little more, one gives a little more, one is stronger, etc. In BDSM, this is all clearly defined - up front.

As far as the S&M part, here's a quote from a reliable source about the benefits of giving up power, "For some, taking on a role of obedience or helplessness offers a kind of therapeutic escape; from the pressures of life, from responsibility, or from guilt. For others, submitting to the power of a dominant, controlling presence may bring about the feelings of security and protection linked with childhood. It is also a way of

avoiding self-responsibility and imposing responsibility for your submissive conduct and responses onto your Dominant.”

And another quote, “Some people like to consider (becoming a submissive) as that point where the 'will' gives way to a superior force.”

Some people have to be tied up to be free.

Sounds almost...spiritual, doesn't it?

Let me ask you: Who do you think had more power in the relationship between Anastasia and Christian?

My opinion? Clearly Ana. Yes, Christian thought he was the Dominant, but who gave him that power? Did he just take it? Maybe at first, but afterward, once she set her limits and left? She had the power. They might have loved equally, but he needed her more. Way more. She didn't take this power, he gave it. Maybe not willingly at first but when he became "Submissive Christian?" Absolutely! As with all the chapters in this book, feel free to disagree!

Punishment

Often, in a lot of relationships, one party will do something to anger the other and yet either nothing gets resolved or it escalates into either aggressive or passive-aggressive behavior, negatively affecting the relationship.

In BDSM, however, punishment is "part of the deal.”

The objective (of punishment) is to allow the sub to feel that justice has been meted out, so that forgiveness is possible. It brings closure to an unpleasant situation. Usually followed by hugs and kisses and real forgiveness. It is used to sweep the cobwebs from the relationship.

With the first book in the FSOG series, Christian meted out punishment fairly frequently. In the latter books, he had to get more creative, since Ana had set her limits. So he "teased her to frustration” sexually and gave her hickeys, in order to teach her. What can "the rest of us” learn from this? As shared in Part 1, safe words can help clarify when behavior is unacceptable or reached its limits. And though many of us might not allow ourselves to be punished physically, we might still offer ourselves for another kind of punishment. Like the concept of a "swear jar.” So...instead of "taking your lumps” physically, your partner could still require you to make another kind of payment (which could be sexual, silly or just unpleasant) as punishment.

Or, if you prefer, look at it as "making amends" – a crucial element in the Four Steps to Forgiveness.

Setting a "Scene"

A key component of sex in BDSM relationships is what's called "Scenes," where the entire act is choreographed by one of the participants, usually the dominant. Yes, whenever anything risky is attempted, special planning is required to ensure safety, and that's one of the reasons, but it goes way beyond that. It means that one person actually takes the time to plan and prepare.

I know, a lot of people, especially men, complain, "Does it have to be such a production every time? Why can't I just get a quickie sometimes?"

I'm sure "quickies" are also part of a BDSM relationship, or I suppose they are, for a number of reasons. But from what I've read – in Fifty and other research, a lot more time and effort is expended in sexual experiences in BDSM. Most "regular" relationships depend on the "mood" to strike, which not only requires both partners to be "in the mood" (which is often not the case, especially in long-term relationships), it replaces the excitement and anticipation of planning with "spontaneity" – which, though it might sound good, is usually not nearly as exciting – for either party. Or, alternatively, "sex dates" are planned in advance, which I suppose might be good but might also feel like a chore on your "to do" list.

But to stage a scene, equipped with props and measured moves, reactions and responses, is something I think most relationships could enjoy. When one party can fully take over the responsibility of pleasuring the other...and take their time in doing so. Hmm...Sounds nice, doesn't it?

Knowing Your Partner's Body

In BDSM relationships, it's crucial for the dominant partner to get an intimate – very intimate – knowledge of their partner's body. When one party is in control, it's easier to do this, because he (or she) has the time to focus on pleasuring the other without (a) worrying about his or her own satisfaction (because he/she can control when that happens) and (b) the partner having to give while receiving. Yes, the "Dom" can ask how their partner is feeling, but just as importantly, he or she can be attuned to every physiological response from every action they take.

Similarly, when the dominant partner is requesting the submissive one to do something in particular, he (or she) can be very explicit in what he wants, making it easier for her to pleasure him.

In *Fifty*, Christian knew Ana's body better than she knew it herself. Yes, it was partly due to his having more experience, but it was also because his experience was in BDSM. It's implied that Elena taught him a great deal about how to satisfy a woman – things that many 28 year olds (not to mention 38, 48, etc.) don't even know.

It's Not All About Sex

In pretty much all the research I've seen, BDSM practitioners say that people misunderstand the lifestyle and think it's all about sex. Kinky sex in particular. But that it isn't. In fact, here's an oft-repeated quote in a source I found useful, “This is not all about sex. Think twice if your potential partner only seems interested in talking about sex.”

Pretty clear!

Here's a powerful statement I found from the BDSM community, “A good scene doesn't end in orgasm, it ends in catharsis.”

Also, given the other topics in this 2-part chapter, there are a lot of other aspects of BDSM that go beyond sex.

Lessons from Role Play

A while ago I was exposed to an entirely new world. It felt like a new planet! A world within a world within a world.

The world of role play.

We all know the "real world."

Then there's the virtual world of Twitter and Facebook.

And then there's the world of role play.

To those of you who haven't been "exposed" (pun intended) to the world of Twitter role play, the best way I can describe it is that it's "live improv theater in 140 characters." And it can be more compelling than television. (Facebook role play is also very impactful, just - to me - a little less "urgent.")

So...what have I learned through my exposure to role play?

The Three "Worlds"

As suggested above, there are three distinct worlds. In the real world, people are who they say they are and interactions are based in reality. In the virtual world, there are various degrees of "real." Many people use pseudonyms, either in order to remain anonymous from their "real life" or to portray a particular image/impression.

In the role play world, people are NOT who they say they are. They're actors playing a character. Most "take on" a character developed by another author, usually from a book, movie or television show. They will use images of public figures (usually actors or models) for their characters.

Here's another way to describe it. Brad Pitt has a real life with real relationships. (Though admittedly outside of most people's concept of reality.) He may also have a public persona that his publicist helps him project to the outside world. And then he will also take on a role of a character in a movie.

Emotions

These three worlds have distinctly different expressions of emotion. The real world we're all familiar with, of course. While on the surface it looks more transparent (we know who the other person is and can probably do some research to validate what we know), we are not exposed to the other person's "inner world. Conversely, in the

virtual world we may not "know" that person (who they are) but in many ways, because of the veil of secrecy, there's more openness and honesty.

The role play world takes emotions to another level altogether. While role players may be "acting" they are actually experiencing life on two (and maybe three levels). The deepest level is the role they're playing. They are having sex or arguments or explorations of intrigue or perhaps (as I experienced) deep emotional discussions. Then there's the "behind the scenes" of the role play - determining how much you tell your other "actor" about who you are IRL (in real life). In many cases, women are playing men and vice versa. Someone may be pretending to be a masterful lover, a concerned parent or even a therapist. But who are these people "in real life?" Sometimes they share, and sometimes they don't. Either way, there's the challenges with the collaborative process. How much do you keep your partner "on edge" with your next steps, and how much is planned out in advance? It's up to the role-players (and, in some cases, the "hub"), which can make it very dynamically exciting for the actors as well as the audience. You never know what'll happen!

Because of this, role playing with someone can be one of the most intimate experiences possible. Not only do you share dialogue, you also disclose your hidden emotions and body language!

But what happens when you emotionally bond with your role-playing partner? He or she may be a virtual stranger, but this intimacy feels REAL. And is, in some ways more "real" than a real-life relationship. (Film and television actors often "fall" for their co-stars, don't they?) The interesting dynamic with role playing is that you can develop a close attachment with a costar you have never seen - or know anything about! Fascinating. And, yes, a little scary.

"Management"

The management or "hub" of a role play group is crucial. Before you join one, make sure you are aligned on the values of the group. For example, some "hubs" feel like they have the absolute right to read the behind-the-scenes direct messages of their "family" members. To me, this is abhorrent. To others, it's accepted. Decide how you feel before you join.

Also decide how you want conflict to be handled. Is there a "boss" who resolves conflict, or is there someone specifically designated as the person to help the group manage disputes? (They'll happen - believe me!)

The other key question you need to ask before joining a group is: how will the characters be portrayed? I've seen some groups that are fiercely loyal, while others take it one, two or perhaps an infinite number of steps beyond the original characters. Also,

the group needs to decide the types of story lines. Are they just about sex and relationships, or will they include real dramatic intrigue? Will the characters just have babies or will they also have exciting careers? And how will they interact with each other? (Multi-player role plays can be very interesting – yet also very challenging to create, coordinate and follow).

Finally, what's the goal of the group? Is it to have fun playing with each other, or is it to do something more meaningful? Or, perhaps is the goal to build an audience, a group of fans who are waiting with baited breath to see what your characters are going to do?

The Audience

How important is the audience? And will the characters interact with the audience, or just "put on a show" on their own? Some role-players are doing it just for themselves, while others are motivated by building fans.

Relating to this, if fans are your goal, then you need to be diligent on following procedures for fans to keep up with your interactions. If your role plays are difficult to follow, then no one will follow them – no matter how exciting they are!

Creativity

Some role players are exceptionally creative. Some even mind-blowing (or at least expanding!) It's one thing to continue to play out an existing character known from your favorite books, it's another to take a lesser character and develop him or her into something interesting! And even more so to create a new character who interacts with the others. I even know of someone who was role playing as a dog. Talk about ingenious! And incredibly fun to follow.

Introverts Rule!

In my "real life" I am an expert on personality types. So I know the distinctions between Introverts and Extraverts extremely well. Which has made it especially fascinating to learn more about some of the people I have role played with. Some are not just shy but might even be completely withdrawn from the world at large. But in role play, they can take on a whole new persona – one that might be domineering, dynamic, playful and/or expressive!

Doing it "Right"

Since this is my book, it clearly reflects my opinion...so here it is as regards to role play.

To me, building an audience was a crucial part of why I did it. Role playing can take hours out of your day or week – and for me the audience is one of the most important, if not the most important motivators.

I got bored with the repetitive "sex and babies" story lines. I liked more drama, more intelligent characters, more interesting dialogue.

I think a hub should set up clear expectations at the beginning and make sure everyone who's recruited understands these expectations and limitations – and then let them go and do what they do (and not micro-manage).

I personally don't like conflict behind-the-scenes, even if it's in jest, it can create unnecessary stress. Maybe other people like "method" actors who continue their aggressive personas backstage, but to me this is simply not fun.

A little planning is important, especially in determining the "big picture" of where you want to go with your role playing partner. But I think it's great to then allow true improvisation to take over and keep your partner on his or her toes. These surprises can turn into very special gems of entertainment – for the actors and the players.

Taking it Further?

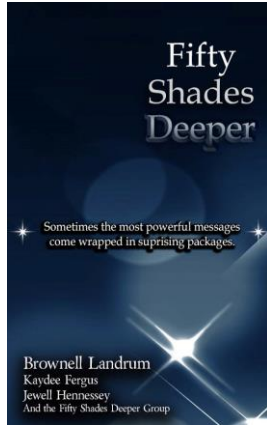
I have "performed" some role plays that I am extremely proud of. Stories that were deep and meaningful and exciting and compelling. Stories worth preserving and sharing beyond the "moment in time" aspect of Twitter and Facebook. This is a personal interest of mine. I've done enough roleplaying to see the potential to create really great stories – yes, that could become successful books! In fact, I'm looking forward to doing this. I just need to find a truly inspired and committed roleplaying partner who wants to collaborate with the same vision.

Also, as an author, I eagerly look forward to the day when role players might want to take Griffin and Paige and the other characters I've developed and expand them into roleplaying scenarios. Will I like them all? I doubt it, but it still would be such fun to see it happen! (And, yes, perhaps I could work with them to put together a new DUET stories novel!)

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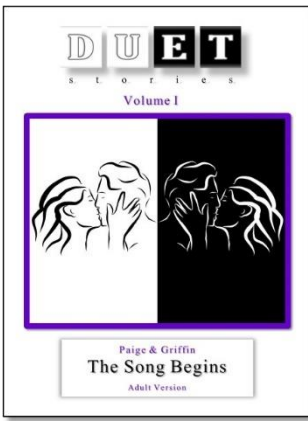
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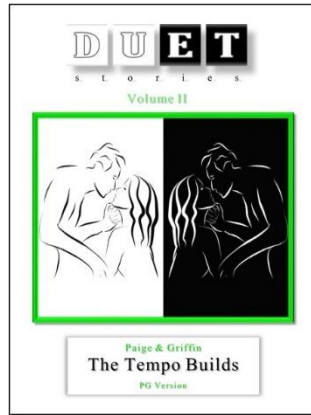
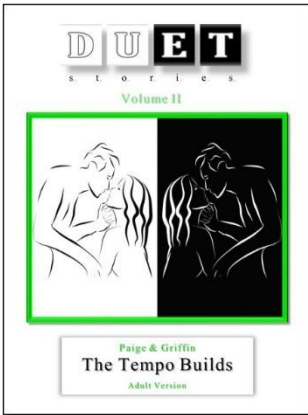
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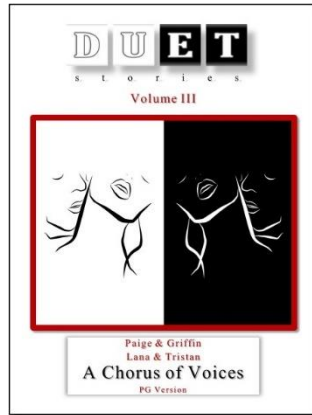
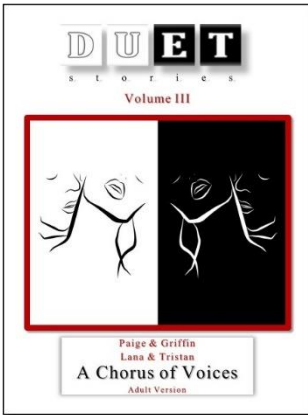
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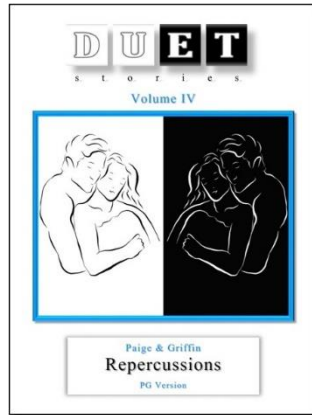
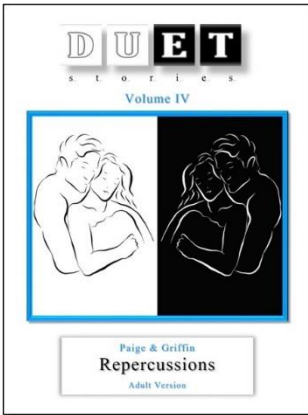
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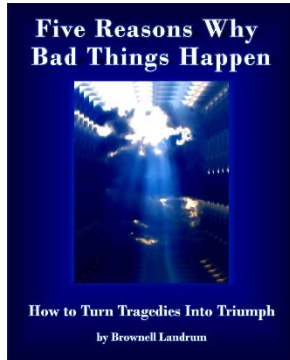
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Reasons Why

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Coming Soon!

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