

# **Fifty Shades of Agency**

The Impact of *Fifty Shades of Grey* on Sexual Agency in America

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### **Dedication**

To E.L. James, and all of the fans of *Twilight* and *Fifty Shades of Grey* – thanks for giving me a super interesting feminist research project!

Also, thank you to all of the feminist theorists that have come before me, and to those who will come after me. Simone de Beauvoir, I would have never gotten here without your inspiration.

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*Table of Contents*

Abstract	Pg. 5
Research Questions	Pg. 6
Introduction	Pg. 7
Literature Review	Pg. 12
Methodology	Pg. 21
Chapter 1: The Embodiment of Agency	Pg. 22
Chapter 2: Psychological and Verbal Negotiation of Agency	Pg. 36
Chapter 3: Agency in the Context of the Contract	Pg. 43
Conclusion	Pg. 48
~Appendices~	
A: The <i>Fifty Shades of Grey</i> Contract	Pg. 50
B: Example of Accepted BDSM Negotiation Form	Pg. 62
Bibliography	Pg. 73

## **Abstract**

The immense popularity of E.L. James' *Fifty Shades of Grey* was due to the book's erotic rendering of a largely heteronormative tale of taboo sexual encounters. This book created a unique space for women in the United States to question their own sexuality and specifically, their sexual agency. In The Agency Line: A Neoliberal Metric for Appraising Young Women's Sexuality, Laina Bay-Chang defines sexual agency as the neoliberal imperative to make choices about one's sexuality. Through Chang's model, this paradoxical understanding of sexual agency highlights the performative nature of hegemonic femininity and traditional gender roles in America. These are the same roles arguably enacted by *Fifty Shades'* main characters, Christian and Anastasia while engaging in BDSM. This thesis offers a detailed literary analysis of the text in relation to consumerism and fandom, the question of sexual agency more generally, and what it means to obtain sexual agency through reading practices in 2016.

## **Research Question**

How do representations of sexual agency in *Fifty Shades of Grey* influence how readers consider their own sexual agency?

## **Sub-questions**

- a. What are the representations of sexual agency in *Fifty Shades of Grey*?
- b. How do women learn through reading *Fifty Shades of Grey*? If so, what do they learn?
- c. What is sexual agency in 2016?

## **Introduction**

*Fifty Shades of Grey* is not just a piece of trashy fan fiction. It has implications for women's understandings of their sexualities and through its cultural iconography reinforces hegemonic gender and sexuality stereotypes including the notion of man as relationship dominant, and woman as a virginal, submissive and emotional object. The *Fifty Shades* series is a cultural phenomenon that deserves the attention of feminist scholars due to its implications for the lives and experiences of female American readers.

*Fifty Shades* began as a collection of blog posts written by fans of the mega-hit young adult book and film series, *Twilight*. The blogs grew so popular that author E. L. James was inspired to write a series of books, the first of which has now been turned into a movie. Prior to *Fifty Shades*, women were rarely seen reading obviously BDSM literature in public places – trains, planes, parks, and conferences. Unlike most other BDSM literature, *Fifty Shades* has become a somewhat acceptable book to read even in the most public of spaces. The wild popularity of *Fifty Shades* can be read not just in the amount of copies sold, but the time frame in which they sold. Until *Fifty Shades*, Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* was the fastest selling book ever – it took *Fifty Shades* only 11 weeks to sell one million copies (Flood 2012, 1). (It took *The Da Vinci Code* 36 weeks to break one million copies.) When women are seen reading this book, they can be said to performing their gender and making a public statement of sexual understanding that comes from the lessons readers learn about sexuality through reading this book. (However misinformed that knowledge may or may not be.)

For the purposes of this thesis, BDSM stands for bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, and sadism and masochism. I will be working under Jay Wiseman's definition of sadomasochism, which he says is, "A rather vague term referring generally to fantasies and

experiences regarding the introduction of domination, submission, bondage, sadism, masochism, humiliation, and related activities into erotic play” (Wiseman 1998, 374).

*Fifty Shades of Grey* is a story of sexual attraction between a young, wealthy white man and a college-aged, middle-class, virginal, white woman. Anastasia (Ana) is a virgin only until she meets Christian; then she becomes a BDSM “submissive” (sub) to her “Dominant” (Dom). Women across the globe have become enraptured with this “romance” story between a Dom and his sub. While there is a seemingly simple plot line, most of the novel consists of related sexual and sensual encounters between Christian and Ana, most of which could be said to lie outside the “acceptable” kinds of sexual encounters that Gayle Rubin creates in her model of the “charmed circle” (Rubin). Each sexual encounter is a place for both Ana and the reader to explore how Ana manages her sexual agency, both internally, and in relation to Christian. When these individual instances of dialogues, descriptions, and reflections are looked at in conversation with one another, these narratives create a complex script of female sexuality for readers. I really want to understand why this book has become so culturally popular, even though it can be seen as work of pornography, due to the extremely graphic, detailed sex scenes.

Race and class both play an important role in this book. For example, Ana is sexually assaulted by her close non-white male friend when intoxicated; yet, the wealthy white man is there to save the day and “rescue” her from this unwanted sexual encounter. Christian’s status as both white, and a CEO of a multi-billion-dollar company help shape him as someone privileged with the ability to be sexual.

Such an overtly non-normative sexual topic could not be discussed in a public forum without at least a little bit of controversy. Feminists, conservatives, and BDSM community members have all voiced their opinions about challenges that *Fifty Shades* provides readers.



Within the feminist movement, there is much controversy about the representations of female sexuality that *Fifty Shades* provides. For example, anti-porn feminists like Andrea Dworkin claim that almost all heterosexual sex is comparable to rape when you live in a patriarchal world, and would probably condemn this book as both heteronormative and solely based on sexual assault (Dworkin 1987, vi). Many feminists have been quoted as saying that the relationship between Ana and Christian normalizes violence against women, even those who claim to be sex positive. Conservatives have condemned *Fifty Shades* as pornographic for its sexually explicit content, which includes unnecessarily graphic representations of sex. The BDSM community argues that the rules and standards of safety and consent in the BDSM community are ignored and misrepresented (Keegan). The goals of these different groups vary greatly, as does their reasoning for publicly questioning the content of this book. This controversy must be explored in greater depth in order to understand what the controversy tells readers about the content of the novel, and of popular culture.

For the purposes of this thesis, I am defining sexual agency as a way to conceptualize the choices women have available to them with regard to their sexual lives. Choices are not infinite – they are shaped by the contexts that women work within. As Liana Bay-Cheng points out, young women’s sexuality is now measured – whether by specific individuals, in the rhetoric of popular media, or from the broader perspective of the generalized other – not only in moralist terms of abstinence and promiscuity, but also in the neoliberal ones related to individual agency and personal responsibility (Bay-Cheng 2015, 279-280).

Ana's sexual agency presents a framework through which to consider how her choices about her sexuality are understood within the context of her virginity, Christian's interest in BDSM play, and in the negotiations of her relationship with Christian.

The strict gender roles that Christian and Ana reinforce provide important challenges into current expectations about a woman's role as a sexual agent. Though Ana's role as a submissive (sub), women are learning how to sexually please men, and that extreme female sexual pleasure can sometimes be achieved by giving men their sexual satisfaction. Ana's incredible ability to achieve multiple orgasm through penetrative sex creates impossible-to-replicate sexual narratives for women, and works to create a fantasy for women about their own sex lives. Women can only make the choices that they have available to them – no one has complete control or freedom over their sexual agency in their daily lives. However, through the construction of fantasy in the mind, complete control can be given to women.

In this thesis, I argue that *Fifty Shades of Grey* has brought new conversations about female sexual agency to middle to upper class, white American women, but ultimately presents female sexual agency in a very heteronormative manner. Female sexuality is not simply the having or not having of agency – it is about the internal and external negotiations that are required to understand the context in which agency is functioning. The heteronormative cultural ideals that Ana grapples with are evidence that dominant discourses reinforce the concept of a post-feminist culture, as described by author Susan Douglas.

Because of its insistence that women now “have it all” (whatever “it” is), enlightened sexism ignores girls and women who are not middle class, upper middle class, or rich, and, for the most part, not white. It is emphatically heterosexist (Douglas 2010, 11).

These heteronormative expectations are limiting to all women, but especially to women of color, non-heterosexual women, and lower income women.

This thesis is also an exploration of my journey of conversation with two fictional characters, whom I have formed a contentious friendship with. The first time I read *Fifty Shades*, I wondered what it was that drew so many women to it. I had heard rumblings of its sexual nature, but I had to find out for myself. So I did. As I began working on my honors thesis research, I was greatly inspired by Simone de Beauvoir and her arguments about gender as a social construction. About the same time, the film version of *Fifty Shades of Grey* was being widely released in theaters. There was so much hype – again, and I just couldn’t quite understand its appeal. Why did I personally enjoy reading a book that was so seemingly antithetical to the feminist movement that I was so committed to? This thesis is an attempt to answer how constructions of femininity, sexuality, and agency can interact with each other all at the same time in very complex ways.

## Literature Review

Judith Butler's 1990 book, *Gender Trouble* has been lauded by feminist scholars for its notions about the performativity of gender. Butler suggests that "gender proves to be performative - that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed" (Butler 1990, 34). Butler argues that gender is not simply a fixed category that individuals mold themselves to fit within, but is rather something constructed through repeated actions. It is also significant that, "performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effect through its naturalization in the context of the body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration (Ibid., xv). The naturalization of the body that she describes here highlights the differentiation of expectations about which bodies are "supposed" to perform which acts. Butler's thoughts on the construction and performativity of gender contributes to our understanding the gender roles that Christian and Ana play in *Fifty Shades*. There are preexisting expectations set by American popular culture that prescribe what these roles are to consist of and what types of physical bodies they are to be performed by. These crucial notions of performativity and acting out a prescribed/scripted gender role will be critical as I analyze the interactions between Christian and Ana.

Susan Douglas argues that many aspects of contemporary American culture reinforce the notion that the work of feminism is now complete, and women can now choose to be objectified, if they so please. She calls this rhetoric of "enlightened sexism":

a response, deliberate or not, to the perceived threat of a new gender regime. It insists that women have made plenty of progress because of feminism – indeed,

full equality has allegedly been achieved – so now it’s okay, even amusing, to resurrect sexist stereotypes of girls and women (Douglas 2010, 9).

Cultural texts like *Fifty Shades of Grey* could be seen to trade on the pervasive ideology of enlightened sexism. This perspective allows for a reading of the novel that does not see Ana as simply controlled by Christian. Rather, this interpretation suggests that because of the work of feminism, women like Ana might choose to engage in BDSM relationships. To an extent, the sexist stereotypes that Christian and Ana represent are framed as acceptable within the enlightened sexist culture in which we currently live. It may be too reductive to claim that all choices about sexuality are shaped by a patriarchal post-feminist culture. Arguably, without the feminist movement’s earlier work towards more sexual liberation for women, and encouragement for women to consider their choices about their bodies and sexualities, the contemporary BDSM culture may not have become something that women could *choose* to engage in.

In “Thinking Sex”, Gayle Rubin argues that certain kinds of sex are socially accepted as “good” or “acceptable” sex, while other kinds of sex are seen as “bad” or “unacceptable” within a model of the “charmed circle” (Rubin 1984, 152). The “charmed circle” is a paradigm in which sexuality can be explored by placing the “good” kinds of sex inside the “charmed circle”, and “bad” kinds of sex outside the charmed circle. For example, “vanilla”, “heterosexual”, and “married” are all traits of sex inside the “charmed circle”. “S/M”, “homosexual”, and “casual” are all traits of sex outside of the “charmed circle”. Ana and Christian’s relationship is an interesting battleground between these two kinds of sex. As they are both heterosexual, white, and upper middle class, they may be allowed to “deviate” into “bad” sexual behaviors, because they still abide by so many other “good” sex rules. For example, if either of them were of a racial

minority or of lower socio-economic class, it is likely that this relationship would be seen as representative of their entire racial group, but because they are white, they are perceived as deviant members of the group. If Christian and Ana were of racial or economic minorities, they might not be read as simply sexual deviants within their racial and class groups, they would be read as representing the whole group. Thus, the race and socio-economic status of Christian and Ana plays a crucial role in the current acceptance of *Fifty Shades*.

Jessica Valenti argues in *The Purity Myth* that virginity is a dangerous social construction meant to keep the control of women's sexuality closely tied to the men in their life (first the father, then the husband), and that women lack power over their own bodies and sexual experiences in their own lives (Valenti 2011, 66). Ana's "deviant" sex with Christian might be read as normative within this type of patriarchal model that sees her virginity as belonging to him. Since Ana has had no other sexual interactions, Christian represents her sexual education of sorts. Furthermore, because her first sexual encounters are with a heteronormatively masculine, male-bodied individual, whom she will later be in a relationship with, the two characters are allowed to fully sexually explore each other without her being constructed as a deviant person, she merely becomes someone who engages in deviant acts. In this way, certain people can participate in deviant acts without becoming deviant *people* given that they "correctly" participate in other parts of the "charmed circle". This ability to move in and out of the "charmed circle" without significant cultural repercussions is a sign of Christian and Ana's racial and classist privilege. As Christian and Ana are engaging in white, heterosexual sex, they are allowed to deviate into S/M styles of sex.

In her 2008 book, *Feminism and Pop Culture*, Andi Zeisler argues that the relationship between popular culture and feminism is extremely important to the success of feminist goals.

“Popular culture has become our common language, and to become fluent in it is, like it or not, a key part of making sense of the larger world” (Zeisler 2008, IX). This book helps to create the important connection between popular culture and feminism, and why it’s a topic that feminist scholars should be concerned with. Zeisler also notes that historically there was a distinction between high and low culture and that popular culture was often equated with low culture (Ibid., 1). This connection between the class of consumers and the popularity of a text can be read as significant in the case of *Fifty Shades*. This implies to us that if the readers of *Fifty Shades* are in fact of a higher socio-economic class, it may not be viewed as low culture, which would stigmatize it as “just” trashy. The class statistics of readers of *Fifty Shades* is an important place for future research.

Laina Bay-Cheng argues in, “The Agency Line: A Neoliberal Metric for Appraising Young Women’s Sexuality” that women no longer work within just the virgin-whore dichotomy; they also have to struggle with agency in a neoliberal context. She creates a framework that includes “abstinent” to “active” on its x-axis and “agentic” to “non-agentic” on its y-axis, and uses this model to argue that the four quadrants represent different amounts of activity and agency that different women possess in different situations. She further argues that, “...in the context of girls’ sexuality – and neoliberal culture more broadly – victim functions as a totalizing identity, one associated with weakness, damage, and impotence...” (Bay-Cheng 2015, 285). This framework will be helpful in understanding how Ana engages with agency within her modern context. This framework helps to complicate the simple “virgin-whore” dichotomy, but adds the dimension of choice involved in level of activity. This will also become important in understanding what readers might understand about their own agency in a neo-liberal moment. For these purposes, neo-liberalism is defined as an economic imperative to make choices and

claim personal responsibility for the choices that one makes. This paradigm helps to complicate the simple narratives of agency of either “having” or “not having” that contribute to simplistic responses to *Fifty Shades*.

Alexandria Champagne, who holds a Masters of Social Work from the University of Michigan, published a brief guide to BDSM safety after Ann Arbor’s Safe Sex Store kept receiving questions about how to reenact the sex scenes from *Fifty Shades*. This short book presents a succinct introduction to BDSM, and provides many resources for further exploration. Champagne talks about the purpose of a BDSM scene as an exchange of power that acts as “a great trust-building exercise” (Champagne YEAR, 4). This definition creates an interesting dichotomy between the power dynamics represented within *Fifty Shades* and the idealized relationship of players in a BDSM scene. Ana willingly allows Christian to spank her with a belt in one of the last (and most intense) scenes of the book. She does not use her safe-word, defined by Champagne as, “a neutral code word that signals to the other party that things need to either stop or slow down. “Red” for “stop” and “Yellow” for “slow down” are common choices” (14). In that scene, there becomes a serious lack of trust between Ana and Christian, which arguably makes the scene unsafe, according to BDSM standards. This lack of trust comes from Ana’s personal experience of the spanking, where she felt “debased” and “humiliated”. I argue that Ana never uses her safewords in this scene because she is in so much pain that the thought doesn’t cross her mind as even an option; she is trying to endure so that the pain will come to an end quicker. Champagne attempts to break down the inaccurate stereotypes of BDSM that are created by *Fifty Shades*. She says, “[BDSM] is not necessarily about whips, chains, leather masks, and calling someone “Sir” (Ibid., PAGE). (“Sir” is what Ana is forced to refer to Christian as when they are in the playroom). “Aftercare” is another term that is defined by Champagne as being



important to BDSM culture and involves "...time after BDSM activity in which the parties involved care for one another" (Ibid., 12). Right after the most intense scene in the book described above, Christian provides Ana no aftercare support – he simply leaves her in her room to cry alone. Ana is also never expected to provide aftercare for Christian, which Champagne highlights as something both parties should provide for each other. This reinforces his heteronormative male stereotype of being emotionless, and completely able to care for himself. In the frequently asked questions section, someone asks, "I'm interested in being a Dominant. Does this mean I can tell people to do what I want?" (Ibid., 22). Champagne's answer is quite clear, and arguably quite contrary to Christian's behaviors. "No! Being interested in – or even being in – a power exchange relationship does NOT entitle you to boss anyone around – not even other submissives not associated with you. Exploring that dynamic requires negotiation and respect of other people. Exploiting that good dominant-type does not mean being bossy, it is about pushing limits while respecting the autonomy and consent of others" (Ibid., 22). These tricky roles are intended to emotionally support both the Dominant and the submissive, so that both parties can learn what gives them pleasure, while still respecting when one party wants to stop the scene. This notion of a good Dominant as someone who respects the autonomy and consent of others is an interesting paradigm in which to place Christian. He can be read as very controlling, and not always concerned first with the consent of others. For example, he even includes a list of prescribed foods in their contract, and tells her how often she must exercise. He is not attempting to just keep Ana safe with their contract – he is attempting to control most aspects of her life, even when she isn't with him, more in line with the style of a "true submissive". To be a "true submissive" one must want to serve completely, and do nothing but serve their dominant. Once we understand that many of the important conventions BDSM

communities have constructed in order to protect their players do not get adequately depicted in the representations of BDSM *Fifty Shades* constructs, we can see that it is not necessarily this type of role-play that is at issue, but rather the fact that *Fifty Shades* presents their unequal relationship as absolutely real.

In 1984, Janice A. Radway wrote the most comprehensive study ever completed on reader reception studies in *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*. In this work, she explores how reading is a social activity (as I suggested about *Fifty Shades* in the introduction), how women see themselves as subjects in the romance novels they read, and how reading impacts reader's experiences of pleasure. She opens the book with a comprehensive look at how book publishing and sales practices have impacted the reading practices of individual women. "Not only do the chains make books even easier for American women to obtain, but they also set up their stores so that the experience of buying a book in a bookstore seems no more threatening or out-of-the-ordinary than that of picking up a paperback while waiting for groceries to move down the conveyor at the market" (Radway 1984, 38). I would argue that this shift to a non-threatening model of book buying has contributed to women's access to novels that contain more sexually explicit material (which may or may not border on pornographic). It is important to acknowledge here that purchasing books from a bookstore is a very middle to upper class privilege. Many women may not be able to afford the financial burden of purchasing books, which would be a very different experience from checking *Fifty Shades* out from a library. I would like however, to problematize Radway's model here, because this reinforces the patriarchal stereotype that women are the ones that take care of household needs, like grocery shopping, and are intimidated by others perceiving them as individuals who both possess a sexuality, and create fantasies for themselves about their sexualities.

Jay Wiseman's *SM101: A Realistic Introduction* provides a comprehensive and useful model for how healthy BDSM interactions should take place. He provides an example set of negotiation forms to be used between players, to provide an idea of the kind of negotiations that should take place for a safe BDSM scene to occur. This set of forms has been reproduced in their entirety in Appendix B of this thesis, for reference. Wiseman defines SM as,

...a negotiated form of safe, consensual, erotic interaction between adults. By definition, it is not abusive, exploitative, violent, demeaning, or otherwise harmful to its participants. If an activity is somehow abusive, exploitative, violent, demeaning, or otherwise harmful then, also by definition, it is not SM (Wiseman 1998, 44).

This definition is useful for this thesis because Wiseman helps create a theoretical model for healthy SM relationships, to use as a standard with which to compare Christian and Ana's relationship.

The first chapter of *Cupcakes, Pinterest, and Ladyporn* released in 2015 from editor Elana Levine opens with Melissa Click's article "Fifty Shades of Postfeminism: Contextualizing Readers' Reflections on the Erotic Romance Series". In this article, Click argues that it is necessary to understand the post-feminist culture in which she claims permitted *Fifty Shades* to become popular. This project is significant to this research because Click interviewed 36 readers about their understandings of *Fifty Shades* and what it means for their lives. While her study was not as comprehensive as Radway's (above), she specifically focused on *Fifty Shades of Grey*, and this study was completed much more recently than Radway's. Click found that, "...appeal is rooted in women's use of the series' recurrent themes of fantasy, romance, and sex to make sense of the sexualized cultural environment in which they are immersed (Click 2015, 17)". While

readers did not explicitly claim that they found themselves to have more or less sexual agency after reading *Fifty Shades*, Click did find that, “it has had an impact on readers’ sexual talk, feelings, and behaviors” (Ibid., 26). Overall, this study was helpful in providing introductory research about the readership of *Fifty Shades*. However, further research on the readership of *Fifty Shades* is warranted, so as to include an intersectionally representative sample of *Fifty Shades* readers.

## **Methodology**

My methodology for this project is two-fold: literary analysis and pop culture analysis. I have conducted a close reading of *Fifty Shades of Grey* in order to examine the elements of the text that work together to create the cultural phenomenon that has become *Fifty Shades*. By considering the language, character descriptions and scenes I will be able to determine what American women learn about female sexuality more generally, and sexual agency more specifically, through reading this pop culture icon. Through exploring literature related both to *Fifty Shades* and sexual agency, I will be able to better understand how the representations of agency in the novel represent cultural expectations about female sexuality and agency.

## Chapter 1: The Embodiment of Agency

Descriptive narratives are given about the physical body of both Christian and Ana throughout the book. The bodies that Christian and Ana inhabit are particularly significant to how narratives are created about their bodies, and the agency that they are allowed to exhibit, based on physical attributes. The following quote comes from the opening paragraph of the book, so this is the first introduction that the reader has to Ana as both a narrator and a character.

I scowl with frustration at myself in the mirror. Damn my hair—it just won't behave, and damn Katherine Kavanagh for being ill and subjecting me to this ordeal. I should be studying for my final exams, which are next week, yet here I am trying to brush my hair into submission. *I must not sleep with it wet. I must not sleep with it wet.* Reciting this mantra several times, I attempt, once more, to bring it under control with the brush. I roll my eyes in exasperation and gaze at the pale, brown-haired girl with blue eyes too big for her face staring back at me, and give up. My only option is to restrain my wayward hair in a ponytail and hope that I look semi-presentable (James 2011, 1) (Italics are mine).

Ana clearly has no problem being frustrated with her own physical body, specifically her hair. It is highly important that the word “submission” is used in the third sentence of the book, since it is something that will later become a major theme both explicitly and implicitly in the book.

The mirror is an incredibly powerful image to open the book with – the mirror is a symbol of Ana both gazing at herself, and how she projects that Christian will gaze at her. Ana is not just looking at her physical body; her thought patterns show that she is also contemplating

the ways in which her physical body represents and challenges her own understandings of herself.

In this paragraph, Ana is building herself up to the reader as a reliable narrator. She is willing to share her private thoughts, and be self-critical. This self-critique is important because this builds trust between the reader and Ana, as a narrator who can be critical of herself, and of the perspective that she provides. I argue that it's important to have a reliable narrator in this book because the sexual scenes and internal contemplations of Ana can be read as "true".

The heteronormativity that surrounds the introduction to both the book, and the main female character are undeniably important. However, this heteronormativity is arguably present because the creation of a heteronormative character allows for constructions of a non-normative sexuality that may not be available to non-white, low income, non-straight women.

Even though there is extreme heteronormativity in Ana being most concerned about what she looks like the first time she meets Christian, this scene can be read as more complex than that. Butler's arguments about the performance of gender are incredibly important here. The repetition of the hair brushing is symbolic for the repetitive nature of the performance of gender. As Butler claims, gender is not something that someone simply is, it is an action that must be repeated in order to be reinforced. Ana is not simply brushing her hair to attempt hegemonic feminine beauty standards, she is reinforcing her gender to both herself through the use of the mirror, and the reader through the use of language.

The clearly sexual nature of the phrase, "I must not sleep with it wet," also helps to set the stage for the sexual events about to take place in the book. It evokes images of both Ana sleeping and of Ana showering. These intimate portrayals of Ana from the beginning of the book help to both sexualize and objectify her. Objectified persons do not have their own sexual

agency; they are merely images to be desired. While readers may not see Ana as having agency right away, this scene does make her relatable for women – culture tells women that they should be the most worried about they look, not how they prepare for an interview in content.

This first paragraph helps to set tone of the book as both highly sexual, reinforcing, and challenging heteronormative expectations. Ana’s agency is also called into question here, because she can’t even control her hair; how is she ever going to have control in a sexual relationship with someone else? The body is the most intimate site of agency – Ana must have agency over her physical body in order to be able to turn her agency outwards.

Judith Butler points out that the performative nature of gender requires that it be a repetitive act in order to be constructed. The repetition of phrases within this quote highlight the requirement of gender performance through repetition. Not only is she repeatedly brushing her hair, she is repeating a phrase about how she should be performing her gender. By looking in the mirror while repeating this phrase, she is demonstrating herself reflective need to encourage the gendering of herself.

Ana’s skin is not an issue for her, because race is a non-issue in *Fifty Shades* only because the characters are white. I would argue that Ana doesn’t have to contend with issues of her skin, because she is white. This scene would be read very differently if she were applying makeup, not styling her hair. The invisibility of her (and Christian’s) race in *Fifty Shades* helps create the white privilege that they are afforded as characters.

The first time that Christian and Ana meet, the positionality of her body is a significant factor in how much agency she is afforded through the gaze of the reader.

I push open the door and stumble through, tripping over my own feet and falling headfirst into the office. Double crap-me and my two left feet! I am on my hands



and knees in the doorway to Mr. Grey's office, and gentle hands are around me, helping me to stand. I am so embarrassed, damn my clumsiness. I have to steel myself to glance up. Holy cow-he's so young (Ibid., 7).

It is undeniably significant that Ana literally falls into Christian's office on her hands and knees. She does not stumble or trip, she falls to her hands and knees – one of the feeblest positions a person can be in. Ana's submissive position to Christian begins from the moment of the first time that they meet. She does not ever get the chance to assert herself as equal to Christian – she will always be marked first as submissive to him. Her socio-economic status is also inferior to Christian's, but he can assume that because of the conditions under which they meet. The power dynamic of Christian and Ana in the opening scene is incredibly significant, because this is the power dynamic that Ana has to wrestle with throughout the entire novel.

This stream of consciousness from Ana about her first introduction to Christian allows the reader to think and feel with Ana, which encourages the reader to further identify with her. This allows the reader to better understand what it feels like to be inside her mind. Not only does the reader get to see what's going visibly going on, but also what's going on inside Ana's mind. Her physical inability to control her own body signifies a lack of agency or control over her own body. Clumsy is defined as having a lack of grace – which is something that people with a lot of control tend to have. Ana is embarrassed by her lack of control; she doesn't *want* to be seen as submissive from the moment they meet. Her relatability plays a significant factor in the fantasy that is created for the reader. And yet, she is able to write about it gracefully.

In the above passage, there is also an interesting connection of Ana being an animal-like agent. Her use of the phrase “Holy cow – he's so young,” is Ana's calling forth of the image of the cow, making her position on her hands and knees similar to that of a cow. This image would

not have been created for the reader if she were to have said “holy shit”, or something else entirely. In this case, the cow is significant because of the double meaning behind the phrase. Historically, it was first used as a euphemism for “holy Christ”, which many people found to be offensive. The narrator’s use of language here is very purposeful, as Ana is again trying to build trust with the reader. She does not want to come off as vulgar – she must be a straight, clean, elegant, innocent girl in order to be viewed as a trustworthy narrator.

Humor is also an important aspect to this scene. Ana literally falls for Christian – the prototypical representation of woman falling for man in a romance novel. This caricature of Ana as vulnerable, is important because it makes her relatable as a character – tripping and falling is the way women have been represented in culture as part of the feminine mystique.

And yet, the phrase “double crap” shows something complex about Ana in this passage. This is not a phrase common in popular American English, suggesting that Ana uses her language creatively without swearing – the use of adult language. Indeed, the reader finds out later that she is an English major. Her rhetorical use of language gives Ana an educated, articulate method of both speaking and thinking which are due to her educational and class privileges. This contribution to her characterization helps to further mark her as middle to upper class, and as a reliable narrator.

Not only is Ana’s body significant to the plot and her characterization, Christian’s body is signifying his strong presence as well. In the following quote, Christian’s body is the object of desire of which Ana is gazing. I would argue that the description of his physical body is what helps to make this scene both compelling, and sexual.

*Kiss me, damn it!* I implore him, but I can’t move. I’m paralyzed with a strange, unfamiliar need, completely captivated by him. I’m staring at Christian Grey’s

mouth, mesmerized, and he's looking at me, his gaze hooded, his eyes darkening. He's breathing harder than usual, and I've stopped breathing altogether. *I'm in your arms. Kiss me, please.* He closes his eyes, takes a deep breath, and gives me a small shake of his head as if in answer to my silent question. When he opens his eyes again, it's with some new purpose, a steely resolve. "Anastasia, you should steer clear of me. I'm not the man for you," he whispers. *What? Where is this coming from?* Surely I should be the judge of that. I frown, and my head swims with rejection. Breathe, Anastasia, breathe. "I'm going to stand you up and let you go," he says quietly, and he gently pushes me away (Ibid., 49).

In this intimate sensual scene Ana is now being reframed as someone with more sexual desire than she has previously had. This unfamiliar need that Ana says she has is a need for sex, a physical desire that she has not been allowed to feel before. Christian's eyes become dark because he is trying to remove himself from the intimacy of the sexual situation, he does not want Ana to be humanized. It's as if Christian can read Ana's mind – he knows that she wants him to kiss her, but he refuses. This is why he slightly shakes his head. His resolve becomes "steely", because of the physical and emotional strength that it takes Christian to not kiss Ana. He is trying to stick to his traditional style of connecting with a potential sub that has worked for him for so long, but he has to keep constantly reminding himself that she is not already a member of the BDSM scene. For Christian, his style is becoming much more difficult to work with, in the context of Anastasia. Christian recognizes aloud, for the first time, that Ana should not be with him because of the danger that he knows he will inflict upon her animal-like being. He is also very in touch with his own emotions, and he knows that it will be hard to keep Ana at the critical distance of a sub. Christian physically pushes Ana away, and she doesn't get the

chance to fight back. If she were given the opportunity to tell or imply to Christian that he cannot simply make all of their relationship decisions for them, she may have gained a greater sense of control. Christian uses the word “man” to describe himself because he is reminding her that as the male bodied individual in their relationship, he is the one with both the physical and symbolic power to decide what their relationship will look like. Ana thinks that she should get to be the judge of their relationship because women are the gate-keepers of sex – she was not expecting to be rejected by him. Jessica Valenti writes about this concept that women are the gate-keepers of sex by claiming,

Making women the sexual gatekeepers and telling men they just can’t help themselves not only drives home the point that women’s sexuality is unnatural, but also sets up a disturbing dynamic in which women are expected to be responsible for men’s sexual behavior (Valenti 2010, 108).

Christian backs up his vocal rejection of her with a physical rejection of her – a slight push away. It’s as if the creation of physical distance will somehow lessen the sexual tension that they feel toward each other.

As the novel continues on, the sexual tension between Christian and Ana continues to build up. This negotiation around sexual tension suggests that we give more consideration to Ana’s sexual freedom – how much power does she exercise in making choices about her relationship with Christian once she realizes the unspoken expectation of sexual intimacy between them? The following quote explores sexuality within the limits of a physically close space.

The elevator arrives, and we step in. We’re alone. Suddenly, for some inexplicable reason, possibly our proximity in such an enclosed space, the

atmosphere between us changes, charged with an electric, exhilarating anticipation. My breathing alters as my heart races. His head turns fractionally toward me, his eyes darkest slate. I bite my lip. “Oh, fuck the paperwork,” he growls. He lunges at me, pushing me against the wall of the elevator. Before I know it, he’s got both of my hands in one of his in a viselike grip above my head, and he’s pinning me to the wall using his hips. Holy shit. His other hand grabs my hair and yanks down, bringing my face up, and his lips are on mine. It’s only just not painful. I moan into his mouth, giving his tongue an opening. He takes full advantage, his tongue expertly exploring my mouth. I have never been kissed like this. My tongue tentatively strokes his and joins his in a slow, erotic dance that’s all about touch and sensation, all bump and grind. He brings his hand up to grasp my chin and holds me in place. I’m helpless, my hands pinned, my face held, and his hips restraining me. His erection is against my belly. *Oh my...* He wants me. Christian Grey, Greek god, wants me, and I want *him*, here...now, in the elevator (James 2010, 77-78).

This short scene is full of details, which makes it passionate and intense. Christian and Ana are physically attracted one to the other, and this physical attraction is heightened in the small space of the elevator. There is also the threat of the doors opening, and having their passion exposed. It is one thing for an intimate scene to take place in a private space (like a home), but when sex moves into the public arena (like an elevator), there is a heightened sense of intensity. Gayle Rubin’s “charmed circle” includes sex in public spaces as being outside the acceptable kinds of sex. Christian and Ana’s personal identities have to be highlighted here,

because they are “allowed” to venture into public sex because they are white, heterosexual, and middle to upper class.

This second of stolen time together in the elevator plays into the sexual fantasy that is created for the reader and demonstrates Ana’s internal struggles with her physical attraction to Christian and her uneasiness with her vulnerability to him. Christian takes control of Ana so quickly that she can’t even decide if she is okay with it or not. Christian is complicating his own understanding of consent, because in this moment he decides that the paperwork is unnecessary. This implies that he is so attracted to her that he doesn’t care if she gives consent to their relationship or not – he is going to do what he wants with her, whether she likes it or not. As both Wiseman and Champagne point out, this is antithetical to the model of consent that has been accepted by the BDSM community. Anastasia’s description of Christian as a “Greek god”, cannot go unnoticed. The reader can infer from the first description that Ana gives of herself from page one that she does not see herself as attractive enough to be with Christian. She may see herself as average, but his status as a “Greek god” sets him far above her. I think that Ana refers to herself as the lucky one, because she has been given the opportunity to meet him. So she is very much involved and interested in him. It is the hope for a kiss that sweeps her off her feet.

After the scene in the elevator, Christian and Ana do engage in a conversation about sexual limits and expectations once they get to Christian’s luxury apartment. This is when Ana first “outs” herself as a virgin to Christian. It is important to note that this conversation takes place only after Christian has shown Ana his playroom, and he is attempting to begin negotiations for Ana to be his submissive.

“Is there anything you won't do?”

“I don’t know.”

“What do you mean you don't know?”

I squirm uncomfortably and bite my lip.

“I've never done anything like this.”

“Well, when you've had sex, was there anything that you didn't like doing?”

For the first time in what seems to be ages, I blush.

“You can tell me, Anastasia. We have to be honest with each other or this isn't going to work.”

I squirm uncomfortably again and stare at my knotted fingers.

“Tell me,” he commands.

“Well... I haven't had sex before, so I don't know.”

My voice is small. I peek up at him, and he's gaping at me, frozen, and pale—really pale.

“Never?” He whispers. I shake my head.

“You're a virgin?” he breathes. I nod, flushing again. He closes his eyes and looks to be counting to ten. When he opens them again, he's angry, glaring at me.

“Why the fuck didn't you tell me?” he growls... “I knew you were inexperienced, but a virgin!”

He says it like it's a really dirty word. “Hell, Ana, I just showed you...” he groans.

“May God forgive me. Have you ever been kissed, apart from by me?... How have you avoided sex? Tell me, please” (Ibid., 108-109).

Christian's reaction to Ana's admission of being sexually inexperienced highlights the heteronormativity with which Christian is used to experiencing sex. Ana's sexual agency has become significantly limited by Christian's outburst. Christian comes off as angry about her

virgin status, which may indicate to Ana that if she chooses not to engage in this sexual relationship with Christian, then she will be in both or either physical or emotional danger.

In order to gain access to her sexuality, Ana must be seen lacking experience, so that she can become sexual in a heteronormatively accepted way. The first sex that Christian and Ana engage in is not BDSM, he must first “teach” her traditional sex acts.

The next two quotes are most powerful when read next to each other, because of the similarity of behavior, but different style with which those behaviors are portrayed, both in the context of Christian’s self-admitted “fucked up” personality.

And then this evening, he actually hit me. I've never been hit in my life... I have fallen for someone who's so emotionally shut down, I will only get hurt – deep down I know this – someone who by his own admission is completely fucked up (Ibid., 284-285).

It is very significant here that Ana use the phrase “hit” which invokes images of sexual assault, NOT consensual BDSM play. In the second scene however, Ana claims to be turned-on by the fear of what Christian will do to her in his playroom.

I oblique immediately, feeling like I’m exiting my body – a casual observer of events as they unfold around me. This is beyond fascinating, beyond erotic. It’s singularly the most exciting and scary thing I’ve ever done. I’m entrusting myself to a beautiful man who, by who his own admission, is fifty shades of fucked up (Ibid., 322).

“Exiting” the body is a notion often associated with sexual assault and rape, as a protection method for the survivor to step outside of the experience. In the above scene, it is not Ana’s body that is experiencing the eroticism, it may be her mind. The submission required to allow



Christian to take control of her body so much so that she becomes an observer of the scene from outside her body shows the incredible amount of trust that she is giving to Christian in her submission. The “fifty shades of fucked up” are present in Christian’s actions, as the reader is not given access to Christian’s perceptions. For Christian, “fifty shades of fucked up” is his description of his sexuality – he is attempting to recognize his own discomfort with his preferred style of sex and sexuality. This description also plays an important role in why Ana is willing to submit to Christian. Ana has come to understand that this BDSM style of sex fulfills a need for him that is unable to be fulfilled elsewhere. The above comment is in contrast with one of her earlier comments about her perceptions of Christian.

Olivia (his assistant) leaps up and retrieves my jacket, which Grey takes from her before she can hand it to me. He holds it up and, feeling ridiculously self-conscious, I shrug it on. Grey places his hands for a moment on my shoulders. I gasp at the contact. If he notices my reaction, he gives nothing away. His long index finger presses the button summoning the elevator, and we stand waiting – awkwardly on my part, coolly self-possessed on his. The doors open, and I hurry in, desperate to escape. *I really need to get out of here.* When I turn to look at him, he’s gazing at me and leaning against the doorway beside the elevator with one hand on the wall. He really is very, very good-looking. It’s unnerving. “Anastasia,” he says as a farewell. “Christian,” I reply. And mercifully, the doors close (Ibid., 16) (Parenthesis mine).

Ana feels self-conscious being dressed by Christian in front of another woman. Ana has identified this woman as fitting into what she thinks is Christian’s fantasy. What she does not yet realize is that the women that work for Christian are all women that Christian would never

engage in personal relationships with – this is why he hires them. He assumes that the women he hires will all want to fuck him, given the opportunity. This signifies Christian's acknowledgment of his hegemonic masculinity that make him an object of desire for heterosexual, white, middle-class women. Ana is comparing herself to Olivia, however Olivia is invisible to Christian. Ana gasps at the physical contact with Christian because of the sexual tension that she feels with Christian.

Ana again describes herself as awkward, especially as compared to Christian. This signifies her acknowledgement that he has much more sexual agency than she does. Ana spends a lot of time describing Christian's hands in this book. This seems to be because of the sexual context that Christian often uses his hands. Physically, having long fingers can be awkward, but he makes use of his hands to provide her with both pain and pleasure. In some ways, this summoning of the elevator is a way that Christian provides Ana with her first experience of the intensity of her body, and its potential ability to give her pleasure. When she leaves the building, it is as if there was a release of sexual tension – she can relax and breathe outside of his stifling presence. Ana is anxious to get into the elevator, because she is anxious to begin the sexual journey that she will begin with Christian. She is excited to be alone in the elevator, because Ana is not yet accustomed to the physical desire that she feels for Christian, she wants to get away from him because she is physically uncomfortable with her desire. The first time that Christian and Ana have sex, he tells her that they will have to train her body because she is so easily excited. This pushing of the elevator button is a foreshadowing of the sex that is to come. Christian and Ana have metaphorical sex long before they ever have physical sex, and this is the first example of that. Christian sees Ana as lacking agency from the first moment that they meet. In this way, he is allowed to take advantage of her, because of her lack of experience with sex.

The gaze is also important to this passage, because of the triangular kinds of interactions happening in this scene. The reader should consider whose gaze is it and who is its victim at different moments. For example, Ana's gaze is upon Christian, while Ana is imagining Christian's gaze upon Olivia. The difference between Olivia and Ana is the desire that Christian has for Ana that he doesn't have for Olivia. Olivia has been added to the story as a support character to further highlight the differentiation in Christian's gaze of desire. However, the reader sees Christian's gaze upon Ana. This difference in Christian's imagined gaze is important to understanding the differences between how Ana and the readers perceive Christian.

## **Chapter 2: Psychological and Verbal Negotiation of Agency**

Christian and Ana both verbally discuss agency, and individually internally question the narratives of sexuality that they are creating, reinforcing, and challenging together.

“Oh, I exercise control in all things, Miss Steele,” he says without a trace of humor in his smile. I look at him, and he holds my gaze steadily, impassive. My heartbeat quickens, and my face flushes again. Why does he have such an unnerving effect on me? His overwhelming good looks maybe? The way his eyes blaze at me? The way he strokes his index finger against his lower lip? I wish he’d stop doing that. “Besides, immense power is acquired by assuring yourself in your secret reveries that you were born to control things,” he continues, his voice soft (Ibid., 10).

Control is something Christian claims that he can and does exercise. One can have control and choose to use it or not. He is not saying that all people have control just that he has control.

What would a trace of humor in his smile signify? He does not see his pun as a laughing matter. He could be hinting at the control he feels obligated to obtain in both his sex and professional life, but he does not make this explicitly obvious. He is telling Ana that she should be wary of him, and that control is something that he spends a lot of time thinking about. Before meeting Christian, Ana had probably never questioned her bodily autonomy and relationship to sexual power, due to lack of opportunity. Sexual agency becomes the most relevant when put into conversation with a partners. (When she is brushing her hair, she has clearly thought about the amount of control that she has over her own body. But does this mean that she has put these

thoughts in conversation with the control that another person may want to feel?) She makes it clear in the scene of sexual assault

It is not that she isn't interested in him, and that she has pondered that as a choice of a life and sexual partner. However, that comes after this scene in the book, so that is a question that the reader some insight into later. Christian says that you have to convince yourself that you have power – it is not something you would have if you didn't consciously choose to think about. Could this be why Ana falls into Christian's office? She hasn't yet been forced to think about her sexual agency, it is something that only comes into her mind once she meets Christian. Much like an animal (discussed above), she hasn't yet had to question her sexual agency. Christian talks about control being something that you have to fantasize to yourself about. These things won't come true if you don't ever question them. Control is something that first has to be fantasized about, so that it can become realized in one's own life.

This conversation between Ana and Christian about control can be seen as a kind of sexual foreplay. The language of control is highly seductive and is used as a subtle form of dirty talk. The couple has not yet engaged in sex, but they are starting to communicate in a more intimate fashion, that will culminate in sexual acts because of the sexual tension that builds between them.

Ana's reactions to Christian's comments about control are intermingled in the quote. Her physical reactions to his vague comments support the claim that his talk is a kind of foreplay – she is physically intrigued both by him, and the conversation. Even though she doesn't admit to herself or the reader that she is sexually attracted to Christian, the feelings that she is experiencing could be attributed to her growing interest in Christian.

Ana's characterization as an English major, who enjoys the kind of romance found in classic novels, can be seen in conversation with Christian's personality. In the following quote, she is telling herself a narrative about Christian that she is hoping will become true.

*If you were mine.* Oh my—what would I do to be his? He's the only man who has ever set the blood racing through my body. Yet he's so antagonizing, too; he's difficult, complicated and confusing. One minute he rebuffs me, the next he sends me fourteen-thousand-dollar books, then he tracks me like a stalker. And for all that, I have spent the night in his hotel suite, and I feel safe. Protected. He cares enough to come and rescue me from some mistakenly perceived danger. He's not a dark knight at all but a white knight in shining, dazzling armor—a classic romantic hero—Sir Gawain and Sir Lancelot (Ibid., 68-69).

Here Ana is wondering to herself how much of her own agency she is willing to give up to be with Christian. Ana is commenting here on the internal conflict that she feels with Christian, and the physical reactions that she has for Christian. She sees how complicated her own feelings are for him, and that the things he does are complicated. She knows that he has power and influence that allow him to do whatever he wants with her – there are no “typical” bounds on their relationship. He can buy her whatever he wants to, and he can track her every move, if he chooses to. His ability to make choices based on his social position and identity limit the choices that Ana can make about how their relationship will be financially managed. Even though he “tracks” her “like a stalker”, she feels safe, even though this seems to attempt to invoke danger. It's not just that Christian can have power and influence over Ana, it's that he wants to use his power and influence over her. This is where his sense of perceived desire for her becomes significant. Even though Christian is trying to push Ana away by calling himself a dark

hero, Ana is choosing to see Christian as the male suitor that she wants him to be. It is interesting that Christian himself should invoke a sense of danger for Ana, yet she sees him as the complete opposite. This scene is an incredibly important example of where Ana's sexual agency has to be put into the context of Christian's power and influence. Ana is attempting to work within his model of control by trying to better understand him through conversation and internal reflection.

Christian views Ana's virginity as a situation to be managed – as if she is a crisis happening in his company. It's important that he first claims that he is going to have sex with Ana – for Christian, consent comes second into the conversation. This further misconstrues the representation of BDSM culture because as a Dominant, Christian would be expected to start the conversation with consent – not to consider it as an afterthought.

“We're going to rectify the situation right now.”

“What do you mean? What situation?”

“Your situation. Ana, I'm going to make love to you, now.”

Oh. The floor has fallen away. *I'm a situation.* I'm holding my breath.

“That's if you want to, I mean, I don't want to push my luck” (Ibid., 110).

The language that Christian uses here of “making love” is incredibly significant. In much of the book he refers to the kind of sex that he engages in as “fucking, hard”. Since this is her first experience of sex, he realizes that she may want to be offered the opportunity to have the kind of virginity loss narrative which has been sold to women as how their first sexual experience should happen – making love as an intimate act.

Sex acts require conversations of negotiations of sexuality. In the following scene, Ana intentionally challenges Christian's power in the relationship. This is an important moment of

claiming power in the relationship as a member of the relationship, not simply as an object of Christian's power and influence.

“Oh... by the way, I'm wearing your underwear.” I give him a small smile and pull up the waistband of the boxer briefs I'm wearing so he can see. Christian's mouth drops open, shocked. What a great reaction. My mood shifts immediately, and I sashay into the house, part of me wanting to jump up and punch the air. *YES!* My inner goddess is thrilled (Ibid., 158).

Ana here is both flaunting her femininity to Christian through her action, and purposefully demonstrating that she is not the only person in the relationship who can make choices about issues of intimacy and sexuality.

You know, when you fell into my office to interview me, you were all “yes, sir” “no, sir”. I thought you were a natural-born submissive. But quite frankly, Anastasia, I'm not sure you have a submissive bone in your delectable body (Ibid., 226).

Here, Christian is suggesting a naturalization of the roles of dominance and submission. Jay Wiseman would take serious issue with this construction, as evidenced by the following quote.

I'm often asked how to tell if a person is likely to want to be dominant or submissive. My basic answer is: “You can't.” I have tried. Believe me, I have tried. After years of trying, I gave up. You just can't reliably tell. You just have to get them in the playroom and see how they react (Ibid., 108).

This also seems to imply that gender is a naturally born phenomenon, not something that is socially constructed, and is reinforced through recurrent action. Christian suggests this more than



attempting to insult Ana. He does refer to her body as “delectable”, which is a very subjective description of her body.

I stare at myself in the over-large mirror, shocked that I still look the same. After all that I’ve done today, it’s still the same ordinary girl gaping back at me. *What did you expect – that you’d grow horns and a little pointy tail?* my subconscious snaps at me (Ibid., 359).

It is incredibly important to Ana’s characterization that she is again contemplating herself in front of a mirror. The mirror is an opportunity for Ana to think about herself both in her physical appearance and her sexuality. Her eyes are “gaping” at her because she is open to contemplating her femininity, her sexuality, and her physical body emotionally in this time of change. Ana is anything but ordinary – she is looking at herself in the mirror internally contemplating the change she feels within herself because she has lost her virginity. Jessica Valenti describes this experience as being “no longer ‘good’... The idea that virginity (or loss thereof) can profoundly affect women’s lives is certainly nothing new (Valenti 2010, 18-19).” The loss of virginity here creates a narrative of the body being wide open – no longer closed, neat and innocent. Ana is looking in the mirror attempting to now understand herself as changed and in a different emotional context than the last time she significantly contemplated herself in the mirror.

“I want to roll my eyes at you.”

“By all means, do, and you will make my day,” he says sternly. I gaze up at the ceiling.

“Well, a spanking would make me up, I suppose.” I purse my lips in quiet contemplation. Christian’s mouth drops open.

“On the other hand, I don’t want you to be all hot and bothered; the climate here is warm enough.” I shrug nonchalantly (Ibid., 445).

Here, Ana is verbally challenging Christian to see if she can engage in a conversation of agency. She is consciously and purposely talking to Christian about doing something that she knows he will not approve of, which will lead to consequences that she is well aware of – a spanking. He has threatened her with this in the past, and now she is trying to see where his boundaries lie. She is weighing the consequences of his need to punish her and her need to disobey his rules. He seems surprised by her comment because he is not used to subs challenging him in the past.

### **Chapter 3: Agency in the Context of the Contract**

Christian requires that Ana agree to a contract of limits for their play, which is a standard practice in BDSM culture. (Wiseman 1998, 57) This contract is not legally enforceable, which Ana knows. Its purpose is the creation of limits, boundaries and expectations of their play. It is important that Christian refers to their play agreements not just as negotiation forms (how Jay Wiseman refers to them), but as a contract. There are legal implications for a contract that do not exist for negotiation forms. Also, a contract is something that historically written by one party, to be signed by the other. The language of the “contract” implies less room for negotiation and discussion than does the language of the negotiation form. Appendix A contains the contract that Christian and Ana talk about, but Ana never verbally consents to, or signs. Appendix B contains the contains the negotiation forms that are suggested by SM 101 as examples.

Christian does seem to take the contract very seriously, as evidenced by the following quote. “Because I’m not going to touch you, Anastasia – not until I have your written consent to do so. His lips hint at a smile. *What? ... The choice is yours*” (Ibid., 74). Ana seems to be confused by what Christian is implying here. His words and his facial expression seem to contradict each other – his language is very serious, but the smile on his lips seems almost playful. Christian is verbally telling her that she gets to make choices about what their relationship will look like – he is giving her the choice about what she wants out of their relationship. Here, agency is not something Ana has for herself, but something that she has to negotiate with Christian. This physical chartering of their relationship is a tangible way to form the bounds of their relationship. He thinks that by having Ana give permission once, he is clearing himself of responsibility of asking permission every single time they have sex. It is also very important that he is hinting at a smile, because it shows that he finds amusement in Ana’s

obvious confusion with his instance on “consent”. Consent has a legal definition, however, the paperwork that Christian has Ana sign, isn’t a legally binding document. Anastasia must work within this difficult paradox of negotiating their relationship and managing her level of comfort with signing a contract.

Another interesting aspect of the contract is the formality of its style, which has important implications for the effects on their relationship. This formality can make humor difficult. For example, in an email to Christian, Ana says, "Okay, I've seen enough. It was nice knowing you" (Ibid., 188). This is after she has read through the contract and has been shocked by what she has read. The reader knows that Ana is being sarcastic, but Christian does not. Ana is attempting to use sarcasm as humor to challenge the amount of power that she perceiving having with Christian after reading the contract.

The following scene is when Ana gives her verbal consent to Christian to participate in their contractual relationship.

“Okay,” I whisper.

What? I have his full, undivided attention. I swallow.

“Okay, I’ll try.”

“You’re agreeing?” His disbelief is evident.

“Subject to the soft limits, yes, I’ll try.” My voice is so small (Ibid., 245).

It is incredibly significant here that Ana decides to tell Christian at her graduation ceremony (where he was the commencement speaker), that she will try this power exchange relationship with him. It is also notable that the narrator describes her voice as being small. This could be read as indicative of her status as a submissive, and practicing her role playing.

In the following quote, Ana verbally, purposely negotiates her power with Christian. It is important that she refers to this exchange as negotiation herself. This highlights the critical lens with which Ana engages in her relationship with Christian. She is not merely a passive object of his control, she has her own ways of gaining power. Through trial and error, Ana has learned methods to challenge Christian's power as merely being over her. Here, the reader can see Ana working with Christian to gain agency.

He rolls his eyes at me, frustrated.

“You're rolling your eyes. Last time I did that, I ended up over your knee.”

“Oh, I'd like to put you there again.”

Inspiration hits me.

“Tell me and you can.”

“What?”

“You heard me.”

“You're bargaining with me?” His voice resonates with astonished disbelief.

I nod. *Yes... this is the way.*

“Negotiating.”

“It doesn't work that way, Anastasia.”

“Okay. Tell me, and I'll roll my eyes at you (Ibid., 361).”

Here, the reader can clearly see Ana working with Christian so that they can both gain the kinds of power and control that they want in their relationship with each other.

In an email to Ana, Christian says, “What I think you fail to realize is that in a Dom/sub relationship it is the sub who has all the power. That's you. I'll repeat this – you are the one with all the power. Not I” (Ibid., 400). This quote is incredibly interesting, especially considered in

the context of the above quote. In some ways, it may be easier for Christian to claim this, because he comes from a place of privilege. To claim that you are the powerless one in the relationship may signify that you are indeed the one with the most power. Powerlessness is often shaped by lacking a voice, here Christian is using his voice, and encouraging Ana to use hers. Of course, Christian cannot totally take away all of Ana's agency – she is a smart, thoughtful character who understands when she is being manipulated.

In the following quote, there is a significant shift in Christian's clear-cut attitude towards his relationship with Ana. This is important, because it signifies a shift in the power dynamics in which Ana is working.

“What's not fair?”

“How you disarm people. Women. Me.”

“Do I disarm you?”

I snort. “All the time.”

“It's just looks, Anastasia,” he says mildly.

“No, Christian, it's much more than that.”

His brow creases. “You disarm me totally, Miss Steele. Your innocence. It cuts through all the crap.”

“Is that why you've changed your mind?”

“Changed my mind?”

“Yes-about...er...us?”

He strokes his chin thoughtfully with his long, skilled fingers. “I don't think I've changed my mind per se. We just need to redefine our parameters, redraw our battle lines, if you will. We can make this work, I'm sure. I want you submissive

in my playroom. I will punish you if you digress from the rules. Other than that...well, I think it's all up for discussion" (Ibid., 458).

Christian refers to the bounds of his relationship with Ana as "battle lines". This language is significant in the context of Ana's sexual agency, because it highlights the contentiousness of their relationship. Christian doesn't seem to be used to having to work with his partner's expectations – he seems used to working in a relationship model that he is used to, and not having to stray too far from that. However, because Christian is willing to step outside of his traditional relationship model with Ana, he is willing to engage in discussion.

## **Conclusion:**

This thesis is an attempt to problematize and unpack narratives about femininity, sexuality, and sexual agency created for readers in *Fifty Shades of Grey*. I have attempted to give Anastasia due credit as a female character, reliable narrator, and sexual agent capable of making informed and conscious choices. This thesis is not just about whether *Fifty Shades* is “good” or “bad”, but about showing how complex the representations of sexuality can be in a single text. The complexity of this novel also contributes to the challenges that I faced when writing this thesis, because I really wanted to understand the text, not just judge it.

This project has led me to realize how much research there still is to do on the *Fifty Shades of Grey* phenomenon! A serious limitation of this study is that I was working under the assumption that women learn about sexual agency through reading this book – that assumption may be inaccurate, or not true for all readers. Another limitation is that I am only one reader – I am bringing my personal experiences and understandings of feminist theory to this project. Many of these quotes could be interpreted very differently by someone else. This project is written just from my perspective, and is shaped by my own blind spots.

Some of the things that could be done to complete further research on the *Fifty Shades* phenomenon are surveys and focus groups with *Fifty Shades* readers and non-readers to better understand what readers actually claim to learn through the reading the book. As I mentioned above, more than just sexual agency should be considered in future studies – there are many lenses and perspectives that could be included. It could also be interesting to study both the fandom and the anti-fandom cultures that have been created around this text in online formats.

Susan Douglas’s ideas about enlightened sexism help to contextualize the phenomenon of *Fifty Shades*. I would like to close with one of my favorite quotes from *The Rise of Enlightened*



*Sexism: How Popular Culture Took Us from Girl Power to Girls Gone Wild* that beautifully demonstrates the struggles that both Anastasia and American women contend with in their everyday lives.

The war between embedded feminism and enlightened sexism gives with one hand and takes away with the other. It's a powerful choke leash, letting women venture out, offering us fantasies of power, control, and love, and then pulling us back in. The only way women today can straddle all of this is to be superwomen (Ibid., 17).

**Appendix A: The *Fifty Shades of Grey* Contract (pages 165-175)**

**CONTRACT**

Made this day \_\_\_ of 2011 (“The Commencement Date”)

**BETWEEN**

MR. CHRISTIAN GREY of 301 Escala, Seattle, WA 98889 (“The Dominant”)

MISS ANASTASIA STEELE OF 1114 SW Green Street, Apartment 7, Haven Heights,  
Vancouver, WA 98888 (“The Submissive”)

**THE PARTIES AGREE AS FOLLOWS**

1 The following are the terms of a binding contract between the Dominant and the Submissive.

**FUNDAMENTAL TERMS**

2 The fundamental purpose of this contract is to allow the Submissive to explore her sensuality and her limits safely, with due respect and regard for her needs, her limits, and her well being.

3 The Dominant and the Submissive agree and acknowledge that all that occurs under the terms of this contract will be consensual, confidential, and subject to the agreed limits and safety procedures set out in this contract. Additional limits and safety procedures may be agreed in writing.

4 The Dominant and the Submissive each warrant that they suffer from no sexual, serious, infectious, or life-threatening illnesses, including by not limited to HIV, herpes, and hepatitis. If during the Term (as defined below) or any extended term of this contract either party should be diagnosed with or become aware of any such illnesses, he or she undertakes to inform the other immediately and in any event prior to any form of physical contact between the parties.

5 Adherence to the above warranties, agreements, and undertakings (any additional limits and safety procedures agreed under clause 3 above) are fundamental to this contract. Any breach shall render it void with immediate effect and each party agrees to be fully responsible to the other for the consequence of any breach.

6 Everything in this contract must be read and interpreted in the light of the fundamental purpose and the fundamental terms set out in clauses 2-5 above.

## **ROLES**

7 The Dominant shall take responsibility for the well-being and the proper training, guidance, and discipline of the Submissive. He shall decide the nature of such training, guidance, and discipline and the time and place of its administration, subject to the agreed terms, limitations, and safety procedures set out in this contract or agreed additionally under clause 3 above.

8 If at any time the Dominant should fail to keep the agreed terms, limitations, and safety procedures set out in this contract or agreed additionally under clause 3 above, the Submissive is entitled to terminate this contract forthwith and to leave the service of the Dominant without notice.

9 Subject to that proviso and to clauses 2-5 above, the Submissive is to serve and obey the Dominant and all things. Subject to the agreed terms, limitations, and safety procedures set out in this contract or agreed additionally under clause 3 above, she shall without query or hesitation offer the Dominant such pleasure as he may require and she shall accept without query or hesitation his training, guidance, and discipline in whatever form it may take.

## **COMMENCEMENT AND TERM**

10 The Dominant and Submissive enter into this contract on the Commencement Date fully aware of its nature and undertake to abide by its conditions without exception.

11 This contract shall be effective for a period of three calendar months from the Commencement Date (“the Term”). ON the expiry of the Term the parties shall discuss whether this contract and the arrangements they have made under this contract are satisfactory and whether the needs of each party have been met. Either party may propose the extension of this contract subject to adjustments to its terms or to the arrangements they have made under it. In the absence of agreement to such extension this contract shall terminate and both parties shall be free to resume their lives separately.

## **AVAILABILITY**

12 The Submissive will make herself available to the Dominant from Friday evenings through to Sunday afternoons each week during the Term at times to be specified by the Dominant (“the Allotted Times”). Further allocated time can be mutually agreed on an ad hoc basis.

13 The Dominant reserves the right to dismiss the Submissive from his service at any time and for any reason. The Submissive may request her release at any time, such request to be granted at the discretion of the Dominant subject only to the Submissive’s rights under clauses 2-5 and 8 above.

## **LOCATION**

14 The Submissive will make herself available during the Allotted Times and agreed additional times at locations to be determined by the Dominant. The Dominant will ensure that all travel costs incurred by the Submissive for that purpose are met by the Dominant.

## **SERVICE PROVISIONS**

15 The following service provisions have been discussed and agreed and will be adhered to by both parties during the Term. Both parties accept that certain matters may arise that are not covered by the terms of this contract or the service provisions, or that certain matters may be renegotiated. IN such circumstances, further clauses or amendments must be agreed, documented, and signed by both parties and shall be subject to the fundamental terms set out under clauses 2-5 above.

## **DOMINANT**

15.1 The Dominant shall make the Submissive's health and safety a priority at all times. The Dominant shall not at any time require, request, allow or demand the Submissive to participate at the hands of the Dominant in the activities detailed in Appendix 2 or in any act that either party deems to be unsafe. The Dominant will not undertake or permit to be undertaken any action which could cause serious injury or any risk to the Submissive's life. The remaining subclauses of this clause 15 are to be read subject to this proviso and to the fundamental matters agreed in clauses 2-5 above.

15.2 The Dominant accept the Submissive as his, to own, control, dominate, and discipline during the Term. The Dominant may use the Submissive's body at any time during the Allotted Timed or any agreed additional times in any manner he deems fit, sexually or otherwise.

15.3 The Dominant shall provide the Submissive with all necessary training and guidance in how to properly serve the Dominant.

15.4 The Dominant shall maintain a stable and safe environment in which the Submissive may perform her duties in service of the Dominant.

15.5 The Dominant may discipline the Submissive as necessary to ensure the Submissive fully appreciates her role of subservience to the Dominant and to discourage unacceptable conduct.

The Dominant may flog, spank, whip, or corporally punish the Submissive as he sees fit, for purposes of discipline, for his own personal enjoyment, or for any other reason, which is not obligated to provide.

15.6 In training and in the administration of discipline the Dominant shall ensure that no permanent marks are made upon the Submissive's body nor any injuries incurred that may require medical attention.

15.7 In training and in the administration of discipline the Dominant shall ensure that the discipline and the instruments used for the purposes of discipline are safe, shall not be used in such a way as to cause serious harm, and shall not in any way exceed the limits defined and detailed in this contract.

15.8 In cases of illness or injury the Dominant shall care for the Submissive, seeing to her health and safety, encouraging and, when necessary, ordering medical attention when it is judged necessary by the Dominant.

15.9 The Dominant Shall maintain his own good health and seek medical attention when necessary in order to maintain a risk-free environment.

15.10 The Dominant shall not loan his Submissive to another Dominant.

15.11 The Dominant may restrain, handcuff, or bind the Submissive at any time during the Allotted Times or any agreed additional times for any reason and for extended periods of time, giving due regard to the health and safety of the Submissive.

15.12 The Dominant will ensure that all equipment used for the purposes of training and discipline shall be maintained in a clean, hygienic, and safe state at all times.

## **SUBMISSIVE**

15.13 The Submissive accepts the Dominant as her master, with the understanding that she is now property of the Dominant, to be dealt with as the Dominant pleases during the Term generally but not specifically during the Allotted Times and any additional agreed allotted times.

15.14 The Submissive shall obey the rules (“the Rules”) set out in Appendix 1 to this agreement.

15.15 The Submissive shall serve the Dominant in any way the Dominant sees fit and shall endeavor to please the Dominant at all times to the best of her ability.

15.16 The Submissive shall take all measures necessary to maintain her good health and shall request or seek medical attention whenever it is needed, keeping the Dominant informed at all times of any health issues that may arise.

15.17 The Submissive will ensure that she procures oral contraception and ensure that she takes it as and when prescribed to prevent any pregnancy.

15.18 The Submissive shall accept without question any and all disciplinary actions deemed necessary by the Dominant and remember her status and role in regard to the Dominant at all times.

15.19 The Submissive shall not touch or pleasure herself sexually without permission from the Dominant.

15.20 The Submissive shall submit to any sexual activity demanded by the Dominant and shall do so without hesitation or argument.

15.21 The Submissive shall accept whippings, floggings, spankings, canings, paddling’s, or any other discipline the Dominant should decide to administer, without hesitation, inquiry, or complaint.

15.22 The Submissive shall not look directly into the eyes of the Dominant except when specifically instructed to do so. The Submissive shall keep her eyes down cast and maintain a quiet and respectful bearing in the presence of the Dominant.

15.23 The Submissive shall always conduct herself in a respectful manner to the Dominant and shall address him only as Sir, Mr. Grey, or such other title as the Dominant may direct.

15.24 The Submissive will not touch the Dominant without his express permission to do so.

### **ACTIVITIES**

16 The Submissive shall not participate in activities or any sexual acts that either party deems to be unsafe or any activities detailed in Appendix 2.

17 The Dominant and the Submissive have discussed the activities set out in Appendix 3 and recorded in writing on Appendix 3 their agreement in respect of them.

### **SAFECWORDS**

18 The Dominant and the Submissive recognize that the Dominant may make demands of the Submissive that cannot be met without incurring physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, or other harm at the time the demands are made to the Submissive. In such circumstances related to this, the submissive may make use of a safeword (“the Safeword[s]”). Two Safewords will be invoked depended on the severity of the demands.

19 The Safeword “Yellow” will be used to bring to the attention of the Dominant that the Submissive is close to her limit of endurance.

20 The Safeword “Red” will be used to bring to the attention of the Dominant that the Submissive cannot tolerate any further demands. When this word is said, the Dominant’s action will cease completely with immediate effect.



## CONCLUSION

21 We the undersigned have read and understood fully the provisions of this contract. We freely accept the terms of this contract and have acknowledged this by our signatures below.

---

**The Dominant: Christian Grey**

**Date**

---

**The Submissive: Anastasia Steele**

**Date**

---

## APPENDIX 1

### RULES

Obedience:

The Submissive will obey any instructions given by the Dominant immediately without hesitation or reservation and in an expeditious manner. The Submissive will agree to any sexual activity deemed fit and pleasurable by the Dominant excepting those activities that are outlined in hard limits (Appendix 2). She will do so eagerly and without hesitation.

Sleep:

The Submissive will ensure she achieves a minimum of eight hours' sleep a night when she is not with the Dominant.

Food:

The Submissive will eat regularly to maintain her health and well-being from a prescribed list of foods (Appendix 4). The Submissive will not snack between meals, with the exception of fruit.

Clothes:

During the Term the Submissive will wear clothing only approved by the Dominant. The Dominant will provide a clothing budget for the Submissive, which the Submissive shall utilize. The Dominant shall accompany the Submissive to purchase clothing on an ad hoc basis. If the Dominant so requires, the Submissive shall, during the Term, wear adornments the Dominant shall require, in the presence of the Dominant and at any other time the Dominant deems fit.

Exercise:

The Dominant shall provide the Submissive with a personal trainer four times a week in hour-long sessions at time to be mutually agreed between the personal trainer and the Submissive. The personal trainer will report to the Dominant on the Submissive's progress.

Personal Hygiene/Beauty:

The Submissive will keep herself clean and shaved and/or waxed at all times. The Submissive will visit a beauty salon of the Dominant's choosing at times to be decided by the Dominant and undergo whatever treatments the Dominant sees fit. All costs will be met by the Dominant.

Personal Safety:

The Submissive will not drink to excess, smoke, take recreational drugs, or put herself in any unnecessary danger.

Personal Qualities:

The Submissive will not enter into any sexual relations with anyone other than the Dominant. The Submissive will conduct herself in a respectful and modest manner at all times. She must recognize that her behavior is a direct reflection on the Dominant. She shall be held accountable for any misdeeds, wrongdoings, and misbehavior committed when not in the presence of the Dominant.

**Failure to comply with any of the above will result in immediate punishment, the nature of which shall be determined by the Dominant.**

---

## **APPENDIX 2**

### Hard Limits

No acts involving fire play.

No acts involving urination or defecation and the products thereof.

No acts involving needles, knives, cutting, piercing, or blood.

No acts involving gynecological medical instruments.

No acts involving children or animals.

No acts that will leave any permanent marks on the skin.

No act involving breath control.

No activity that involves the direct contact of electric current (whether alternating or direct), fire, or flames to the body.

---

## **APPENDIX 3**

### Soft Limits

To be discussed and agreed between both parties:

Does the Submissive consent to:

● Masturbation	● Vaginal intercourse
● Cunnilingus	● Vaginal fisting
● Fellatio	● Anal intercourse
● Swallowing Semen	● Anal Fisting

Does the Submissive consent to the use of:

● Vibrators	● Dildos
● Butt plugs	● Other vaginal/anal toys

Does the Submissive consent to:

● Bondage with rope	● Bondage with tape
● Bondage with leather cuffs	● Bondage with other
● Bondage with handcuffs/shackles/manacles	●

Does the Submissive consent to be restrained with:

● Hands bound in front	● Wrists bound to ankles
● Ankles bound	● Binding to fixed times, furniture, etc.
● Elbows bound	● Binding with spreaderbar
● Hands bound behind back	● Suspension
● Knees bound	●

Does the Submissive consent to be blindfolded?

Does the Submissive consent to be gagged?

How much pain is the Submissive willing to experience?

Where 1 is likes intensely and 5 is dislikes intensely: 1-2-3-4-5

Does the Submissive consent to accept the following forms of pain/punishment/discipline:

● Spanking	● Paddling
● Whipping	● Caning
● Biting	● Nipple clamps

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Genital clamps</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ice</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hot wax</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Other types/methods of pain</li></ul>

**Appendix B: Example of Accepted BDSM Community Negotiation Forms**

These negotiation forms are reproduced directly from Jay Wiseman’s, *SM 101*. It is worth noting that he refers to these forms as negotiation forms, not as a contract. The language of the contract is significant because of the legal implications and formality of the contract. He includes both long and short versions of these forms, which are supposed to help facilitate conversation between scene players.

***Negotiation Short Form*** \_\_\_\_\_

Note: Please use the back of the form if additional space is needed.

1. People \_\_\_\_\_
2. Roles \_\_\_\_\_
3. Place \_\_\_\_\_
4. Time \_\_\_\_\_
5. Oops \_\_\_\_\_
6. Limits \_\_\_\_\_
7. Sex \_\_\_\_\_
8. Intoxicants \_\_\_\_\_
9. Bondage \_\_\_\_\_
10. Pain \_\_\_\_\_
11. Marks \_\_\_\_\_
12. Humiliation \_\_\_\_\_
13. Safewords \_\_\_\_\_
14. Opportunities \_\_\_\_\_
15. Follow-Up \_\_\_\_\_

16. Anything Else? \_\_\_\_\_

**Negotiation Long Form** \_\_\_\_\_

Note: Please use the back of the form if additional space is needed.

**1. People**

Who will take part? \_\_\_\_\_

Who will watch? \_\_\_\_\_

Note: The session will involve *only* those people specifically named above.

Will any permanent record be made of the session (photographs, audiotapes or videotapes)?  Yes  No

Explanation \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Roles**

Who will be dominant? \_\_\_\_\_ Who will be submissive? \_\_\_\_\_

Type of scene:

master/slave    mistress/slave    captive    servant/butler/Etc.  
cross-dressing/gender play    age play    animal play    other \_\_\_\_\_

Any chance of switching roles?  Yes  No

Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_

Will the submissive promptly obey?  Yes  No

Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_

May the dominant “overpower” or “force” the submissive?

Yes  No

Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_

May the submissive verbally resist?  Yes  No

Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_

May the submissive physically resist?  Yes  No

Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_

Does resistance equal a “strong yellow”?  Yes  No

Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_

May the submissive try to “turn the tables”?  Yes  No

Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_

Does the submissive agree to wear a collar?  Yes  No

Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_

The submissive agrees to address the dominant by the following title(s):

\_\_\_\_\_

### 3. Place

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Who will ensure privacy? \_\_\_\_\_

### 4. Time

Begin at: \_\_\_\_\_ Length: \_\_\_\_\_

Beginning signal: \_\_\_\_\_ Ending Signal: \_\_\_\_\_

Who will keep track of time? \_\_\_\_\_

### 5. Oops

Does everybody involved understand that there is some risk of accident, miscommunication, misperception and/or unintentional injury?

Yes  No



Does everybody involved agree to discuss any mishaps in a constructive and non-blaming manner?  Yes  No

## 6. Limits

### Submissive's Limits

Submissive's physical/emotional/SM activity limits:

Any problems with the submissive's...

heart  Yes  No   lungs  Yes  No   neck/back/bones/joints  Yes  No

kidneys  Yes  No   liver  Yes  No   nervous system/mental  Yes  No

Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_

Is the submissive wearing contact lenses?  Yes  No

Does the submissive suffer from carpal tunnel syndrome or related problems?  Yes  No

Does the submissive have a history of...

seizures:  Yes  No   dizzy spells:  Yes  No

diabetes:  Yes  No   high or low blood pressure:  Yes  No

fainting:  Yes  No   asthma:  Yes  No

hyperventilation attacks:  Yes  No

Describe any phobias: \_\_\_\_\_

Submissive's other medical conditions: \_\_\_\_\_

Any surgical implants (breast, face, etc.)?  Yes  No

Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_

Is the submissive taking aspirin?  Yes  No

Is the submissive taking ibuprofen, Aleve, or other non-steroidal, anti-inflammatory drugs?  Yes  No

Is the submissive taking antihistamines?  Yes  No

Other medications submissive is taking: \_\_\_\_\_

Allergic to:

bandage tape:  Yes  No nonoxynol-9  Yes  No

Other allergies: \_\_\_\_\_

In case of emergency notify: \_\_\_\_\_

Dominant's Limits

Dominant's physical/emotional/SM activity limits:

Any problems with the dominant's...

heart  Yes  No lungs  Yes  No

neck/back/bones/joints  Yes  No kidneys  Yes  No

liver  Yes  No nervous system/mental  Yes  No

Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_

Dominant's other medical conditions: \_\_\_\_\_

Medications dominant is taking: \_\_\_\_\_

In case of emergency notify: \_\_\_\_\_

Is the dominant currently certified in First Aid/CPR?  Yes  No

Safety gear in hand:

paramedic scissors:  Yes  No flashlight:  Yes  No

first aid kit:  Yes  No blackout light:  Yes  No

fire extinguisher:  Yes  No

Will the play be in an isolated area such as a farmhouse?  Yes  No

If yes, what will ensure the submissive's safety if the dominant becomes unconscious?

no bondage to chair, bed, etc.:  Yes  No

no gag:  Yes  No

silent alarm:  Yes  No

third person present:  Yes  No

telephone/radio/panic button within submissive's reach:  Yes  No

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## 7. Sex

Does any participant believe they might have a sexually transmitted disease?

Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_

Have participants been tested for HIV?  Yes  No

Has any participant tested positive?  Yes  No

Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_

Circle which of the following sexual acts are acceptable:

Masturbation    dominant to submissive                      submissive to dominant

                    self-masturbation by submissive                      self-masturbation by dominant

Fellatio                      dominant to submissive                      submissive to dominant

Cunnilingus    dominant to submissive                      submissive to dominant

Analingus                      dominant to submissive                      submissive to dominant

Anal fisting    dominant to submissive                      submissive to dominant

Vaginal intercourse    dominant to submissive                      submissive to dominant

Anal intercourse                      dominant to submissive                      submissive to dominant

Is swallowing semen acceptable?  Yes  No

Is any participant menstruating?  Yes  No

Will sex toys such as vibrators, didoes, butt plugs, etc. be used?  Yes  No

Describe: \_\_\_\_\_

Which of the above activities will involve birth control pills, diaphragms, spermicidal suppositories, lubricants containing nonoxynol-9, or contraceptive

foam/suppositories/gel? \_\_\_\_\_

Which of the above activities will involve condoms, gloves, dental dams, and/or other barriers? \_\_\_\_\_

### 8. Intoxicants

The dominant can use (only) the following intoxicants during the session: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Acceptable quantity: \_\_\_\_\_

The submissive can use (only) the following intoxicants during the session: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Acceptable quantity: \_\_\_\_\_

### 9. Bondage

The submissive agrees to allow (only) the following types of bondage:

hands in front:  Yes  No

hands behind back:  Yes  No

ankles:  Yes  No

knees:  Yes  No

elbows:  Yes  No

wrists to ankles (hog-tie):  Yes  No

spreader bars:  Yes  No

tied to chair:  Yes  No

tied to bed:  Yes  No

use of blindfold:  Yes  No

use of gag:  Yes  No

use of hood:  Yes  No

use of rope:  Yes  No

use of tape:  Yes  No

use of handcuffs/metal restraints:  Yes  No

use of leather cuffs:  Yes  No    suspension:  Yes  No

mummification with plastic wrap, body bag, or similar techniques:  Yes  No

Any past bad experiences by either person with bondage, gags, blind folds, and/or hoods?:  Yes  No

Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_

## 11. Pain

Submissive's general attitude about receiving pain:

likes       accepts       neutral       dislikes       will not accept

Quantity of pain submissive wants to receive:

none       small       average       large

Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_

Dominant's general attitude about giving pain:

likes       will give       neutral       dislikes       will not give

Quantity of pain dominant wants to give:

none       small       average       large

Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_

Will the "now" technique be used?  Yes  No

Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_

Will the "nod" technique be used?  Yes  No

Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_

Will the "one to ten" technique be used?  Yes  No

Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_

The following types of pain are acceptable:

spanking:  Yes  No

paddling:  Yes  No

whipping:  Yes  No

caning:  Yes  No

face slaps:  Yes  No

biting:  Yes  No

nipple clamps:  Yes  No

genital clamps:  Yes  No

clamps elsewhere:  Yes  No

locations: \_\_\_\_\_

hot creams:  Yes  No

ice:  Yes  No

hot wax:  Yes  No

tickling:  Yes  No

Other types/methods of pain: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional remarks: \_\_\_\_\_

## 12. Marks

Is it acceptable to the submissive if the play leaves marks?  Yes  No

Visible while wearing street clothes?  Yes  No

Visible while wearing a bathing suit?  Yes  No

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Is it acceptable to the submissive if the play draws small amounts of blood?

Yes  No

Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_

How easy or difficult has it been to mark the submissive in the past?

\_\_\_\_\_

## 13. Erotic Humiliation

The submissive agrees to accept being referred to by the following terms:

---

The submissive agrees to the following forms of erotic humiliation:

“verbal abuse”:  Yes  No

enemas:  Yes  No

forced exhibitionism:  Yes  No

spitting:  Yes  No

water sports:  Yes  No

scat games:  Yes  No

other: \_\_\_\_\_

Any prior really good or really bad experiences in these areas? \_\_\_\_\_

### 13. Safewords

Safeword #1 and its meaning: \_\_\_\_\_

Safeword #2 and its meaning: \_\_\_\_\_

Safeword #3 and its meaning: \_\_\_\_\_

Non-verbal safewords and their meaning: \_\_\_\_\_

Will “two squeezes” be used?  Yes  No

Will the “extended hand” technique be used?  Yes  No

### 14. Opportunities/Special Skills

Anything in particular either party would like to try or explore? \_\_\_\_\_

---

### 15. Follow-Up

(Please include a note about who will initiate contacts.)

After the session: \_\_\_\_\_

The next day: \_\_\_\_\_

A week later: \_\_\_\_\_

In case of a crisis: \_\_\_\_\_

**16. Anything Else?** \_\_\_\_\_

What will become of this form after the session? \_\_\_\_\_

**Post-session Notes**

**Dominant**

Overall feeling: \_\_\_\_\_ one to ten scale (ten tops)

Best part: \_\_\_\_\_ one to ten scale

Worst part: \_\_\_\_\_ one to ten scale

Other comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**Submissive**

Overall feeling: \_\_\_\_\_ one to ten scale

Best part: \_\_\_\_\_ one to ten scale

Worst part: \_\_\_\_\_ one to ten scale

Other comments: \_\_\_\_\_



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