

BDSM comes out of the dungeon

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INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPERS "BDSM is definitely becoming the new normal in terms of sexual intimacy between partners to create extra excitement in the bedroom."

Durban - "Sticks and stones may break my bones but chains and whips excite me," sang Rihanna in her hit song, S&M - and if Fifty Shades of Grey has anything to do with it, many more people will be singing it.

People are warming up to bondage, discipline, sado-masochism (BDSM) and what was once considered taboo, is slowly gaining a place in society.

Mistress Paige, a professional dominatrix and owner of Different Strokes, a BDSM service in Durban, said after the release of the Fifty Shades of Grey books and movie business has started to boom. She calls it "the new normal".



Picture: Mujahid Safodien

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According to studies about 10 percent of the population has practised BDSM.

"The percentage of people openly practising BDSM was very small. It seems with the release of the books, that people are more willing to try this, compared with pre-50 shades, but mostly with the young and upwardly mobile 20-something's. They seem to communicate their sexual preferences much easier than those over 35."

"There is still resistance, and more from the men, as they see being submissive as a weakness. What they don't understand is that by giving up control to trust another shows incredible strength. It boils down again to our social upbringing," she said. She said the number of people within the community, those in the clubbing scene and those joining Fetlife.com (Facebook for kinky people), sits at roughly 2 500 people in Gauteng alone.

Mistress Paige said although South Africa was still in its infancy in comparison with countries overseas, for a number of reasons, she has seen an increase in clientele either wanting her services or buying sex toys for their bedroom.

Asked whether BDSM was bordering on abuse, she said, BDSM was all about negotiation, consent and safe words. BDSM only becomes abuse when a submissive checklist is not followed, or when a play scene doesn't stop after a pre-negotiated safe word is said. What people don't understand is that BDSM play is all about what the submissive wants, needs, likes or dislikes.

Plays are structured around the submissive's limits and boundaries. This is where 50 Shades got it wrong. Christian Grey just handed a contract to Anastacia without consulting her first.

She said couples should not be under the impression that BDSM mended relationships.

"If a couple battles to communicate in their 'normal' relationship, they will battle even more in BDSM, as this lifestyle is all about communication... before a play, during a play and the feedback required after a play. I have done numerous couples' training sessions for this exact reason, where the relationship is not working and the couple thinks that going into BDSM will sort things out. It's a short term solution, before things slide back to the way they were," she said.

"Couples who have problems within their normal day-to-day lives should see a therapist. If they try BDSM and land up with the wrong person it could end up in abuse. This lifestyle requires you to be completely honest with yourself, on an emotional and

psychological level, so you need to know who you are, what you want, what your limits are and what you are willing to put up with," she said.

Mistress Paige warned about a single woman entering into the lifestyle looking for their very own Christian Grey.

"The truth is that he doesn't exist. Women are naively accepting the books as reality, but the lifestyle is far uglier. It concerns me that these women are walking into the lifestyle with blinkers on, without doing their own research, without knowing who they are and what they want. Just as in vanilla or normal life, there are predators within the community who are just waiting for these ladies, so that they can be taken advantage of," she said.

Marlene Wells, a clinical psychologist, said that the movie had provided more public awareness on BDSM behaviours, but there was a particular type of person who went for this type of behaviour and they were not born of Hollywood hype.

"For those who practise BDSM it is considered a 'different kind of pleasure' or a compelling need fulfilment – planned and choreographed, it is not just focused on sex. However, individuals all have a threshold for behaviours that are tolerant to pleasurable."

She said that it was all about balance and choice.

"A person may reach a point at which they personally feel they cannot participate in these extreme behaviours. If such a person feels compelled to comply or starts to feel controlled outside of the dominance/discipline of BDSM – this is where it becomes more abusive. It is literally balance – mental balance and personal threshold," Wells said.

Dr Marlene Wasserman (who is also known as Dr Eve), a couples and sex therapist, said that BDSM had a stigma attached to it. "Prior to 2013 those who participated in BDSM activities were said to have a psychological illness (DSM5) and it was treated medically, because it was out of the norm. After 2013 this fell away and it is no longer considered an illness," said Dr Eve.

There is a large community who practise BDSM but do not reveal it. Some people enjoy the power exchange or the pain and pleasure element. There are also different levels of BDSM but it can change into abuse when the dominant does not stick to the agreed boundaries."

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