

“ANNEXURE A”

<http://www.mamamia.com.au/rogue/fifty-shades-of-grey-review-rosie-waterland/>

Rosie Waterland expected the whole movie to be a bit of a cheesy laugh. Instead she walked out of the cinema on the verge of tears.

I walked into the premiere screening of *Fifty Shades of Grey* last night planning to walk out with a bunch of ridiculous and funny material that would lead to a hilarious recap. Instead, I walked out of the cinema on the verge of tears.

I'm really, really sorry you guys. I know I made a big deal yesterday about how I was going to write a 'totes-hilare' review. I obnoxiously posted pics from the red carpet and tweeted in all caps at the first sighting of pubes.

But I screwed up. I screwed up big time. I went into this film thinking it would be two hours of B-grade hilarity about bondage that I could make fun of. It was actually two hours of incredibly disturbing content about an emotionally abusive relationship that left me really, really shaken.

And now I'm embarrassed that I ever joked about it.

I haven't read any of the *Fifty Shades* books, so I went into last night's screening cold. I think that was the problem. The phenomenon has only ever been on the periphery of my care-factor zone. I honestly thought the story was just about a young, sexually inexperienced woman, who meets a slightly older, extremely sexually experienced man, and he teaches her everything she needs to know in three books of clit-tingling sex-scenes.

It was my understanding that the sex was BDSM-themed, which, with my limited knowledge of that stuff, I assumed included some tying up of hands and slapping on the bum and... I don't know – blindfolds?

I thought the books were all about kinky, slightly naughty sex. Sex that mixed pleasure with a bit of pain and made housewives around the world read the book with one hand free. And I'm all about women pleasuring themselves, so other than thinking I was glad some sexually-repressed women were getting their rocks off, I didn't really give it much more thought.

I had heard the rumblings from domestic violence groups wanting people to boycott the film, but with limited understanding of the story, I assumed that was because it involved a woman being physically harmed by a man during sex. And my opinion was, well, if they're two consenting adults, and being tied up and slapped is their thing, then what's the big deal?

But I had no idea that *Fifty Shades of Grey* isn't just about the sex. It's also about an incredibly disturbing and manipulative, emotionally abusive relationship.

So, about half an hour into last night's screening, I found myself doing a horrified double-take. I quite suddenly realised that I was watching a film that glorified domestic abuse.

The relationship between Christian Grey and Anastasia Steele is one of the most fucked up and upsetting I've ever seen portrayed on the big screen.

And let me be clear to the women who are incredibly defensive of the book that gave them a sexual awakening: When I talk about domestic abuse, I'm not talking about the sex.

In fact, I considered the sex to be the least offensive part of the movie. Christian's 'playroom' was everything I had hoped for comedy-wise – it looked like the home you imagine the gimp from Pulp Fiction would go home to at the end of the day. He tied up Anastasia and they did lots of sexy things with whips and feathers and her pleasure seemed just as important as his, which is refreshing for a blockbuster film.

But let's take the sex out of the equation for a minute. Because as I was sitting in that cinema last night, I was completely floored by what I was watching. And by what millions of women had accepted as a relationship to aspire to.

Christian meets Anna. He is immediately obsessed with her. He figures out where she works and turns up there unannounced. He *tracks her phone* one night and confronts her on the street. He even lets himself *into her home*, and shocks her by walking into her bedroom while she's alone.

When they start dating, he immediately puts himself in a position of complete control. He plays with her emotions and confuses her by doing things like tenderly kissing her, then pushing her away. He refuses to share a bed with her after they sleep together. She is in tears about the way he treats her within a few days. She finds herself staring longingly at couples who seem to be happy and affectionate with one another.

He buys her a computer so he can contact her whenever he wants. He sells her car and provides her with one that he approves of, all without asking her. He tells her that she's not allowed to tell anybody about what goes on between the two of them, or it's over, essentially isolating her from friends and family.

He says that she must dress in clothes that he chooses. She must go to a doctor that he chooses, and take the contraceptive that he chooses. She must eat what he chooses. She's not allowed to drink to excess. He tells her that it is her job to please him, and that if she doesn't keep him happy to his exact specifications, it's over.

When he finds out that she has scheduled a trip to her mother's house in another state without asking him, he is furious. He throws her over his shoulder and screams, "YOU ARE MINE. ALL MINE. DO YOU UNDERSTAND?"

By this point, Christian has complete control of Anna. He dictates when they see each other, how affectionate they are with each other and who Anna is allowed to talk to and spend time with. Her friends and family can tell that she's unhappy.

But above all, Anna is confused. Whenever she tries to reach out to Christian, she doesn't know if he's going to be receptive or ice-cold. He's inconsistent, and, desperate to hang on to the few moments that he's nice to her, that inconsistency keeps Anna under his control. She seems to think that if she stays, if she just keeps trying, she'll figure out how to make him happy and he'll stop treating her so badly.

Anna is smack-bang in the middle of an emotionally abusive relationship.

Now, take all of what I just described, and add some BDSM sex. Then, take all the conditions Christian placed on Anna, and frame them in the context of an 'official BDSM contract' that he made her sign.

That is how this movie makes domestic abuse seem okay. It's emotional abuse disguised as a 'naughty sex contract'. It's domestic violence dressed up as sexy fantasy.

And it's a genius, subtle move. Putting this kind of controlling, emotionally abusive relationship in the context of a sexy billionaire who just needs to be loved, makes it ridiculously easy to convince audiences the world over that this kind of behaviour is okay. He's not some poor drunk with a mullet, hitting his wife for not doing the dishes. Christian is classy. Rich. Educated. He's not what most women imagine an abuser to be, and his kind of abuse is not what most women would immediately recognise.

Not to mention, the combination of emotional abuse and sexual bondage means anybody who says they find the message in the story disturbing can be reduced to a 'prude', or accused of not understanding what BDSM involves. The blurred lines in this film mean any kind discussion about abuse can be easily shut down by those determined to be obtuse because they like the sexy blindfolds.

But there is no doubt in my mind that the film I watched last night was a disturbing and clear depiction of a controlling and emotionally abusive relationship. This was domestic violence. I don't care how many women learned to embrace sex because of *Fifty Shades of Grey*. THIS WAS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.

I was somewhat heartened when the film ended with Anna deciding her limits had been pushed too far. She leaves Christian and is clear that she doesn't want him to follow. Then I found out that she goes back to him, and spends the next two books in the same emotional and manipulative turmoil. She spends the next two books clinging to the good moments they have together, hoping that eventually the good will outweigh the bad. Hoping that one day she'll figure out how to make him happy, so he won't need to keep treating her badly. Hoping that if she just... keeps... trying...

This was domestic abuse marketed as Valentine's Day fun. That's why I nearly cried. And that's why I couldn't write a funny recap.

I'm embarrassed that I ever thought I could.