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## ONE SHADE OF FEAR

There are ominous connections between the popularity of 50 Shades of Grey and the current socio-political landscape, issues that have nothing to do with what takes place sexually between consenting adults. Debate regarding moral, philosophical and/or psychological implications of certain sexual behaviors is not without merit but is not the intent of this discussion.

Non-harmful consenting behaviors of different types, sexual or non-sexual, can be considered nothing more than “play”; yet at the same time, “play” can have significant underlying meaning, overtly or symbolically.

As per media reports, it is currently very fashionable to be reading, considering, debating and at times enacting “play” involving domination, submission and bondage, based upon the themes within 50 Shades of Grey.

Any relationship involves the consensual relinquishing of certain aspects of independence and autonomy, ranging from serious decisions (regarding living arrangements, occupational paths, finances, child-raising, etc.) to the mundane (“Where should we eat tonight?” “What movie should we see?”). At times, this involves arriving at a compromise, where there may be a path “midway” between two opposing opinions; at times, the choice is limited to taking one path or the other. However, even when compromise involves one party agreeing to accept the other’s choice over their own, in healthy relationships, that does not involve coercion, mercenary interests, intentional infliction of pain, submission of personal independence or placing one person in a superior position and the other in an inferior position.

You do not have to be a Freudian nor subscribe to essentially outmoded theories of “id”, “ego” and “superego” to appreciate the significance of a person voluntarily submitting to the domination of another.

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Common sense indicates that the position of submission (voluntary or not) implies that: 1) The dominant person is superior and/or more powerful; 2) The person submitting is inadequate to make their own decisions; 3) The person submitting does not deserve the right to make their own decisions; and/or 4) The person submitting deserves to be punished.

If submission is not the result of coercion or force, the willingness to assume that position is a result of low self-esteem, guilt, repressed anger and ultimately, underlying fear or terror. Even when occurring within “play” and even if “enjoyed” the willingness to accept being dominated can be traced back to attempts to cope with experiences of fear or terror. Being dominated for financial gain is no different – the deeper terror is being rationalized based upon fear of some degree of poverty.

Of course, coping with fear through submission is ultimately ineffective and self-defeating. Which is exactly where our socio-political system is currently, on both sides of the political spectrum (albeit not necessarily equally so). Whether looking at the “members of the 99%” who vote against their own best interests, or looking at the “members of the 1%” who are ignoring all of the historical data that cannibalizing the middle class eventually leads to economic chaos *including* for the “elite” class – an extensive percentage of the population is involved in politically and economically acting out roles of dominance and submission that are inherently dangerously self-destructive. Political and economic theories differ and deserve careful debate. However, unless and until decisions and compromises (by both leaders and the populace) are based upon rational decision making rather being based on unspoken and often denied emotional reactions to fear – until adults are able to face and address their fears rather than relying only upon acting out fantasies – the prognosis for a healthy and stable society will remain, at best, guarded.