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BETWEEN THE SHEETS



BEDTIME: Author Marty Wilson tells blokes how to draw the shades.

Author MARTY WILSON explores what the outrageously popular *Fifty Shades of Grey* means for couples.

Sales figures for the *Fifty Shades* series are above 30 million copies and about 1.5 million Aussie women have apparently read at least one of them.

A bookstore owner in Sydney told me that it "sold more in three months than *The Da Vinci Code* did in two years".

These books are obviously hitting a nerve (among other body parts). And it can't just be due to them being a romance between a female lead and a handsome billionaire who gets a bit kinky – Mills & Boon, Jackie Collins and Jilly Cooper have been whipping and cracking their way to the best-seller lists for

years.

Sex and sexuality is a deeply intrinsic part of being a human being. If it's not working, for most people it is a big deal.

So what could the enormous, record-smashing popularity of the *Fifty Shades* series indicate has been missing in our sex lives?

Here are three questions couples should seek to answer.

Do you believe "good enough" sex is good enough?

We're all happy to get golf lessons, go to business seminars, and buy books on "how to do the perfect Christmas feast" and yet, due to society's inbuilt hang ups about sex, when it comes to this cherished and sacred part of our lives that most of us desperately want to be wonderful and fulfilling – we're supposed to "just know" how to be great in bed without investing any time or effort into it.

If you don't believe me, try turning up to your next night out and, instead of announcing you've started socially acceptable activities such as zumba or pilates, casually mention



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you've enrolled in a tantric sex course aimed at teaching multiple orgasms.

I asked sex therapist and relationship coach Jacqueline Hellyer if this unwillingness of couples to openly explore ways to have better sex led to people, particularly women, settling for ordinary sex lives.

She agreed and said this idea of "good enough is good enough" was even promoted in some circles.

Hellyer related her experience at a recent conference for sexologists (the industry term for psychologists and therapists who deal with sex and relationships) where she was shocked and dismayed to hear one speaker say "women aren't very sexual, they're like frozen chickens in bed, so it's important we don't get their expectations up and lead them into thinking they can have better sex".

I suggested the sales of *Fifty Shades* would indicate that many women were actually very interested in enjoying sex more. Hellyer agreed: "While many women aren't as libidinous as men on the desire side of sex, they have the potential to be more sexual than men on the response side, so I believe we should be telling women about their potential, to inspire them, and informing them and their partners how to get her there."

Hellyer asked why advising women to lower their expectations in the bedroom was seen as OK when it wouldn't wash in any other area of life.

"Imagine if a woman went to a financial adviser and was told: 'Just accept the amount of money you have now, don't strive for more, and I won't tell you how to be more financial because I don't want you to have high expectations.' Ludicrous."

If there's one thing that the success of *Fifty Shades* has surely proven, it's that there are many, many frozen chickens out there who are incredibly interested in thawing out and, dare I say it, even getting a little marinated and flame-grilled. So how do we do it?

Do you talk about sex?

These days we are more connected than ever. We spend our days emailing, texting, Facebooking and Tweeting to all our 10,000 close friends facile, surface-level conversations about nothing. But most of us find talking about sex incredibly hard.

Psychologist John Gottman is a marriage therapist and the author of the bestselling *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*. In it he says: "No other area of a couple's life offers more potential for embarrassment, hurt and rejection than sex. No wonder couples find it such a challenge to communicate about the topic clearly."

He says the awkwardness we often feel leads to poor communication.

"Conversations can be indirect, imprecise and inconclusive. Frequently both partners are in a hurry to end the conversation, hopeful that they will miraculously understand each other's desires without much talk.

"They rarely say things like 'I love it when you stroke my breasts for a long time the way you did last night' or 'Mornings are my favourite time for making love'."

There is a heart-breaking catch-22 in the way women often feel their man should "just know" what they want, and they'd feel too awkward or, God forbid, too slutty to ask explicitly. Men are keen, desperate even, to be your best-ever lover – but we are, in the main, complete idiots who will totally miss any cryptic hints or casual comments, and need to be told in step-by-step, fold tab A into slot B, instructions on exactly what you want. Sorry fellas, you know it's true.



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Do you feel safe enough to explore in bed?

Sex, when it's done well, isn't just two bodies doing the do. When both (or even all three or four) of you are prepared to let your masks slip there is a chance for it to become divine.

However, when we spend so much of our day hiding behind our social masks, it can be hard to open up and express our deeper desires.

Gottman has some superb tips for how couples can share their needs and wants. He says: "We have to talk to each other about sex in a way that lets both of you feel safe. That means learning the right way to ask for what you want, and the appropriate way to react to your spouse's requests. The key to talking about sex is to be gentle."

He advises that couples should try to have the same attitude as a professional cook: "A chef isn't insulted if a customer isn't in the mood for polenta tonight or has an aversion to squid. Instead he or she makes accommodations that will satisfy the customer's palate".

So why are women loving *Fifty Shades*? Says Hellyer: "Many women quite like their fella to be more of a man in bed. Not a macho, arrogant arsehole, but a commanding, respectful and adoring man who creates a space where she feels so safe and comfortable that she can just go 'I'm yours, take me'."

But where do fantasies and B&D fit in, considering there's a fair bit of that in *Fifty Shades*?

"You have to remember it's a work of fiction," says Hellyer, laughing. "So, in the same way James Bond always saves the whole world, Christian and Ana's sex play is extreme. But I think many women like a male who is attentive and deeply interested in her

pleasure. Christian and Ana do experiment, but when she says something is not on, he is fine with it. And when Ana says she wants more intimacy, he says 'That makes me feel scared and vulnerable, but for you I'll give it a go'."

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What can we all do to embrace a bit of *Fifty Shades*? "Don't get complacent with each other," Hellyer says.

"Keep making the effort. Men, adore your woman; and women, allow the adoration! Be open to it and respond positively. He's doing it because he genuinely loves and desires you. Your appreciation and

acceptance makes him feel so good. He'll become more confident in his masculinity, allowing you to be more expressive in your femininity."

Marty Wilson is the author of the *Fifty Shades of Blokes* trilogy, *Fifty Shelves of Grey*, *Fifty Spades of Grey* and *Fifty Shades of Grass*, \$14.99 each from bigskypublishing.com.au.

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