

They've read the book, now for the play

Georgia Graham

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IT IS not the usual kind of book tie-in, but the success of the novel *Fifty Shades of Grey* and its sequels has been accompanied by a spike in demand for bondage “toys”.

Sales of fur-lined handcuffs, satin bow restraints and silk blindfolds have increased by as much as 300%, according to online adult leisure companies and high-street erotic underwear shops.

Commentators believe the writings of EL James, a former television executive now acclaimed as the queen of “mummy porn”, are switching women from Mills & Boon to S&M.

Fifty Shades of Grey is about the relationship between a rich businessman and a virginal student. It includes explicit erotic scenes featuring bondage and masochism.

A “beginner’s bondage kit” for bedroom play can be bought on the internet for £17 — about the same price as the trilogy of James’s novels in paperback.



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The biggest boom is for what the books refer to as “jiggle balls”, which are used to enhance women’s sexual pleasure. They are also known as kegel balls and were introduced in the 1940s by Dr Arnold Kegel, a Californian gynaecologist, as an aid to prevent incontinence in new mothers. An earlier version, known as Ben Wa balls, were sometimes made from ivory and were in use in Asia hundreds of years ago.

One retailer, Lovehoney, which owns the *Coco De Mer* shop in London’s Covent Garden, said sales of jiggle balls had increased by almost 700%. In the first week of July, the firm sold 904 sets of the balls compared with a previous average of 120 a week.

Neal Slateford, its co-owner, said: “The big surge is very visible in our sales graphs. Normally bondage isn’t something we would ever put on to our home page for fear of scaring nervous customers off. But now we see more couples visiting the site specifically looking for more kinky products.” Sales of riding crops with a purple heart tawse, “spanking paddles” and “pleasure beads” have all increased. In March, Lovehoney sold 200 pairs of nipple clamps. Last month the figure was 852.

Ann Summers, the high-street chain, said it had temporarily sold out of jiggle balls after a 200% jump in sales. It said it had seen a sharp rise in sales of what it calls “sexcessories”, with blindfolds up 60% and rope ties 35%.

Jacqueline Gold, the company’s chief executive, said: “The last time I saw this type of cult product was the Rampant Rabbit, which is the most famous sex toy in the world. If this book helps women talk to each other about their relationships and spices up their sex lives, let’s have more of it.”

Fun Factory, which manufactures Smartballs, a brand of jiggle ball, has had to add night shifts at its factory in Germany to keep up with the demand.

Last week sales of James’s trilogy hit 20m in America. *Fifty Shades of Grey*, the first book, has broken a British record by selling 1m copies in 11 weeks, outstripping the *Da Vinci Code* and *Harry Potter*.

In contrast to those earlier bestsellers, two-thirds of James’s sales are ebooks. The books explore the relationship between Christian Grey, 27, a handsome control freak with a voice like “dark melted chocolate fudge caramel”, and Anastasia Steele, 21, a naive college girl who meets him when she interviews him for her student newspaper.

The novels are already inspiring a host of spin-offs and the first is to be made into a film by the producers of *The Social Network*. Marcelle D’Argy Smith, the author of *The Lovers’ Guide: What Women Want from Sexual Relationships*, said: “I have never wanted to be led around on a lead, but an awful lot of women dream of a dominant male ravishing them.

“Men get their rocks off on gadgets and football. Women don’t have that, but they want sex toys in lieu of that. They want to be thrilled and *Fifty Shades of Grey* is making them feel aroused.”

Petra Boynton, a psychologist, said: “There have been numerous flurries in recent years over everything from *The Chippendales* to *9½ Weeks* to women’s online erotic story-sharing websites and forums, all of which have been heralded as being a new dawn in our sexual lives. This rise in sales may be partly a ploy to cash in on the success of the book. Purchasing toys doesn’t necessarily translate as using or enjoying them.”

Additional reporting: Nick Renaud-Komiya