

Nov 1
2018

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THE STRUT

claiming your **strut**



She teaches us the art of seduction at one of her East End workshops

Pro dominatrix **Madam Storm** on walking the walk to power and success



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Florence Derrick
meets dominatrix
Madam Storm, whose
Strut masterclasses
empower women

The confidence
coach helps
women find
their feet with
poise and
stilettos

walk
the walk

Dominatrix, motivational speaker, seduction tutor. I knew from the start Madam Storm would be a formidable woman. But I wasn't prepared for how down-to-earth and downright lovely the female empowerment coach was.

"Hi darling," she cried as I stepped into The Book Club in Shoreditch, leaping up from her latte in a flurry of faux fur, leather and stilettos the same crimson shade as her lipstick. "You're beautiful."

If Madam Storm's job is to make women feel good about themselves, the first two minutes of our meeting showed her to be a total pro.

We'd met to discuss her Strut masterclasses, which she started running in September last year.

In the sessions, Madam Storm teaches women to walk confidently in high heels. But it's about much more than that.

"Strut is all about not giving a s***," she said. "It's about you saying, I am here, I am powerful, I own my sexuality and I am authentic."

"A strut is me."

Towering more than six feet in her heels and having worked as a dominatrix for 11 years, Madam Storm comes across as the epitome of confidence and sass.

But I quickly learned she didn't always feel so comfortable in her

own skin - despite the fact she'd always been strutting.

"People celebrate me for being this confident, sexy woman and everyone wishes they had it," the 34-year-old said.

"But it's a blessing and a curse."

"I had so many challenges growing up. I was sexually assaulted, I was bullied. I had my power taken away from me and my coping mechanism was to be like, 'No, f*** that. I'm going to take back my power.'"

Madam Storm grew up on an estate in Tulse Hill, relocating to Vauxhall (where she now lives again with her boyfriend) and eventually Croydon as a teenager.

"I didn't grow up with privilege," she said. "I grew up poor. My parents were cleaners and I remember getting up at four in the morning to go to work with them."

"But from Vauxhall you can see central London. I remember even then thinking, one day I'm going to be out there, exploring the world."

"Now I'm in black taxis going over the river. I'm like, yay."

Growing up, her struggles had nothing to do with an identity crisis.

"I remember being 11 and knowing what it was to be sexy," she said. "To know you have some sort of power that allures the opposite sex. But it kind of f**** with me. There was no way I could switch it

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It is the most empowering feeling when you walk into a room and don't even speak, but just you walking around the room makes someone tremble

Madam Storm

off or tone it down because I didn't know what I was doing.

"I've always been tall and curvy, and I've always strutted. I'd walk into a room and command all this attention, but that came with bullying. I ended up going to seven different schools."

"I had a really hard time being me. Adults would feel uncomfortable around me and that would make me feel uncomfortable - dirty and ashamed about being the person I am. As a teenager, you're not allowed to express yourself in a sexual way and for it to be positive."

In her early 20s, Madam Storm found a non-judgemental environment for the first time - in a community she'd only heard spoken about negatively before. "Being a dominatrix allowed me to express myself for the first time after

all those years of being bullied for who I was," she said.

"I finally found a place where women were supportive of me. They loved the fact I was tall, and different - they encouraged me."

"And suddenly I had men who wouldn't even look at me without my permission, who would treat me with the utmost respect."

"Being a dominatrix healed and empowered me."

"It is the most empowering feeling when you walk into a room and don't even speak, but just you walking around the room makes someone tremble."

"I grew up on an estate where I couldn't even go to the shops without being harassed. I was bullied for having this attitude and presence, but then in domming I was celebrated for it and I could whip the s*** out of men at the same time. I was like, 'Yes!'"

"I like that exchange of power. And then to get paid s***loads of money for it? It's like, 'Alright, I did that, girl!'"

"It was very therapeutic for me." It also opened up to her a life of glamour - "I said to myself, one day I'll live in Chelsea."

"And I ended up living just off the King's Road and thought, I made it" - but the lifestyle that accompanied the scene didn't always have a positive effect.

"Earning that much money at such a young age, you get caught up in drugs and alcohol," she said.

"That fuelled the demons I had from being sexually abused."

"I used to sleep until 3pm because I could. One hour's work domming would be the same as someone else's wage for a week."

"One day I was like, 'No, this isn't it.' I couldn't have gone through all this and for it to not be for a reason."

"I always felt I had a purpose." Madam Storm swapped partying for early-morning exercise and eventually competing in the World Bodybuilding Federation.

"It changed my life," she said.

"People saw my transition and were inspired by it."

"I got flooded with messages saying: 'You're such an inspiration, I love your confidence' - but I was just being myself."

"But I loved the feeling that I was making people feel good about themselves."

"I always had the ability to make other women feel empowered. Because I was bullied, I couldn't understand why someone would want to make someone else feel s*** about themselves."

"I was the girl who'd walk into MAC, see you putting on a lipstick and say: 'Oh my god, that looks so

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cute on you.' I thought, I'm going to get into coaching - not fitness, but the mindset side.

"My personal journey of healing has brought me to where I am today, empowering women. I feel that it's my purpose in life. The women I coach message me literally all the time, saying: 'Thank you, you inspire me, you empower me.'

"But really I need to thank them. They've helped me as much as I've helped them."

Which brought us back to Strut.

How exactly does a strutting session go down?

"When ladies first walk into my strut masterclass I make it my business to hug each and every one of them and give them a kiss," she said. "Before we start anything I create a circle and say: 'This is a safe, non-judgemental space. You are amongst girlfriends.'

"Each person says something about why they're there, which allows other people to be like, oh my god, me too. It gives them something in common and they realise that we're on a journey together. Then we do a warm-up. We each say: 'I am powerful' and have 20 other people saying back: 'Yes you are.'

Then comes the strutting.

"We have five different struts," said Madam Storm.

"The power strut, the pussycat strut (which is everybody's favourite), the sass, the seductive and the diva.

"The power strut is all about you standing up nice and tall, owning your space. A lot of women, especially tall women, don't want to draw too much attention so they hunch their shoulders over and they look down.

"This is about self-confidence and being able to walk into a room and command that attention. And so you should, because you're a beautiful woman and you're okay with yourself.

"The pussycat strut is very, very sexy. It's about you bringing out your sexy goddess and showing off.

"You touch your neck, you move seductively and you say: 'Look at me, aren't I beautiful, aren't I sexy?'"

Do women feel awkward, I wondered, testing out their struts for the first time?

"I'm very good at reading body language after so many years being a dom - I know when someone's not feeling comfortable," Madam Storm said.

"Of course everyone's going to feel a little bit uncomfortable because they're in a new place.

"But I see the difference from when they first walk in.

"By the second strut they're like, 'Yes honey.' They're giving it all this sass, blowing kisses to themselves.

"It's absolutely incredible."

Women attend the strut masterclasses for a variety of reasons.

"The common denominator is confidence," she said.

Madam Storm was harassed and bullied growing up and attended seven schools, but channelled it into empowering women to own their space



PATRICK STRAUB

"They want to learn how to walk in their stilettos. They want to learn how to command attention in a positive way. They want to feel empowered and confident with themselves."

But for many, it's an emotional experience - and Madam Storm takes her job to hand-hold them through it very seriously.

"Women cry in my masterclasses because for once they're being celebrated for who they are, no matter their shape, size, colour, what they do for a living," she said.

"I have women who have been sexually assaulted and feel uncomfortable with being sexy again - because they feel like if they are, they deserved it.

"Then they come into this safe space and they're like, 'No. I don't have to hide my breasts, or my legs. Why should I have to wear a hoodie so someone doesn't look at me?'"

"And they fall in love with

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Just be your authentic self, because that's when you're at your happiest, most free and most powerful. Wear that nice perfume. Wear that red lipstick. Don't hide

Madam Storm

themselves all over again."

Others come to Madam Storm's masterclasses to face their body-image struggles, which sometimes make it hard for them to even look at their own reflection.

"If someone's not looking in the mirror, no one says anything but they're all watching," she said.

"There was one lady who wouldn't look in the mirror throughout the

whole class until the very last strut - and everyone was like, 'Yeah.' And clapped and cheered for her. It was so beautiful."

But be warned - one word is banned in the sessions.

"People aren't allowed to say, 'I'm bringing out my inner Beyoncé,'" she said.

"No you're not, goddammit.

"You're bringing out the inner Susie, the inner Sam, the inner Jessica.

"This trend of always relating yourself to a celebrity? It's bad business and it's bad for your self-esteem.

"You are you. And that's why you are so beautiful and so perfect.

"Because you're the only one that looks like you.

"That's why we create our own struts in the masterclasses. I say, 'I'm going to give you the techniques and the mindset, but I want you to be you.'"

For Madam Storm, femininity means power. But in our society, these two words aren't always seen together, especially in professional

contexts.

So I asked her how women could use the power of the strut and all the lessons of self-love learned from it, to get to the top in business?

"I don't understand the idea that if a woman is strong or has authority, then she's not feminine," said Madam Storm.

"Why? I see a lot of women who are like, 'I work in a corporate company and men won't respect me if I'm feminine.'"

"But when you're trying to seduce somebody - and when I talk about that I don't just mean in the bedroom, we're seduced every day, by politicians, adverts - 'Ooh, I want to have that chocolate cake.' That chocolate cake is seducing you, honey - you don't match masculinity with masculinity. It doesn't work that way.

"If you lead naturally with your masculine energy, then cool, do that. But if your personality is to lead with your feminine energy, and you feel suppressed because you don't want them to not take you seriously?"

"Just be your authentic self because that's when you're at your happiest, most free and most powerful.

"Wear that nice perfume. Wear that red lipstick. Don't hide.

"The more we hide away, the less people are going to know we're there.

"So sit up, shoulders up. You're a beautiful woman. If you want to flip your hair, girl, flip your hair. Ask questions, put your hand up, speak up, speak loud.

"That will project confidence - I am proud of being a woman and f*** what you think."

Madam Storm should know, considering the barriers she came up against in setting up her business in the way she wanted to.

"I had big marketing directors and PR agents saying to me I looked too intimidating," she said.

"It was the same s*** I got in school. 'No, don't put that picture up. Don't tell them you're a mistress. Don't swear.' But I f***** swear.

"If I'm going to empower women to be themselves, I can't be a fraud. I have to be myself.

"This is why I get so teary when I get these messages from people. Because I had to fight so hard to be me.

"So my advice? Free yourself from self-judgement. Once you do that, you free yourself from judgement from others.

"Accept who you are. Stop comparing yourself to others. Just stop. Today. Right now. And fall in love with yourself again."

● Madam Storm is hosting her next Strut masterclass at the Queen Of Hoxton in Shoreditch on November 21. Tickets from £25. Go to teachmestorm.co.uk for more information or to book



Madam Storm wears a faux fur coat, a bespoke design by her partner Mr Marcus, @exhibit69 on Insta

Madam Storm and Mr Marcus demonstrate the art of seduction at their Shoreditch seminar



NATALIE APPELWHAIT MORGAN

command performance

Florence Derrick

Pet, get on your knees." A middle-aged man, dressed in nothing but a patent leather thong and collar, kneels and starts licking the dominatrix's stilettos.

"See, I train my pets very well," says Madam Storm, holding high in one hand the leash that's attached to the man's collar and a wooden cane in the other.

I'm at Learn The Art Of Seduction, the first seminar the dominatrix and female confidence coach has held with her partner Mr Marcus, at Hoxton Square Bar And Kitchen in Shoreditch – an event that showcases what she teaches in the one-to-one seduction classes she holds with women, along with her Strut workshops.

It's been fairly raucous until this point. The night kicks off with smoky whisky cocktails and a BDSM-themed game of charades, with the audience of around 40 – nearly all female – shrieking clues to each other to describe spanking horses, latex gloves, nipple clamps and an electric shock crop.

Then the power couple struts in, Madam Storm head-to-toe in a dark glittery dress that shimmers like the night sky. Mr Marcus takes his seat next to an array of whips, ball gags and sensory deprivation masks decorated with handpainted flower patterns (he's a designer and fetish wear artist).

The first third of the night is structured as a Q&A hosted by erotic writer Yve Nimi, who first asks the couple how they met – which instantly descends into the story of when they first had sex.

This sets the tone for the rest of the night. As Torture Garden regulars (the world's largest fetish club, in London) and BDSM connoisseurs, Madam Storm and Mr Marcus respond openly and non-judgementally to audience questions about introducing kinks to the bedroom and their partners, how to "play" safely and what all the equipment is for.

The vibe switches between serious discussions about the importance of honest communication between men and women, and uproarious chats about the etiquette of sending dick pics.

Audience members are telling personal stories about their relationships, asking questions that would be outrageous in almost any other context, or whooping and clapping at the couple's kinky stories, in turn.

We're a few cocktails in and have just taken five to grab another from the bar, when we're surprised with a seduction demonstration by Madam Storm and Mr Marcus.

She performs a sexy dance for him, dressed in a leather harness, before he pulls a sensory deprivation mask over her face and proceeds to spank her.

We're all starting to get a bit hot under the collar when Mr Marcus calls time out, the music stops and we all laugh and applaud.

An audience member speaks of how "refreshing and beautiful" it is to see a black couple occupying the stage, and how she feels this is unusual in the kink and BDSM scene – which is also met with applause from the majority-black crowd.

Then it all gets a bit more interactive, as Mr Marcus takes a back seat and Madam Storm calls for her "pet" to join her on stage.

For the first time, the audience is quiet, studying the dominatrix's body language and vocal instructions as she demonstrates the dom-sub dynamic.

Now it's our turn. "Who wants to spank him?" she asks, and a few tentative hands go up.

Audience members try their hand with the cane and the flogger whip, while Madam Storm makes certain that they're allowed to explore the technique in a safe space – no laughing is tolerated, only encouragement.

Madam Storm teaches one woman in the audience how to use her voice to instruct the "pet" – "Come here, pet. Stand up straight. Kneel down." – and asks her, afterwards, how it made her feel.

"Liberated," she says, smiling broadly.

We're pretty sure the "pet" is enjoying himself, too, which is confirmed when Madam Storm gives him permission to speak about his fetish. He's as enthusiastic as his mistress allows him to be.

After a quick crash course in candle wax dripping, the night draws to an end and we reluctantly cheer the couple off stage and tipsily make our way home.

I'm sure everyone in the room left with an opened mind, a feeling of freedom and the confidence to tell their kinky secrets to their partners when they got home.

That's what Madam Storm's art of seduction classes are all about – giving people the confidence to own, and explore, their sexuality. And that's a pretty powerful gift. Go to teachmestorm.co.uk for information on Madam Storm's upcoming events and to book (from £16)