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The Abuse Litmus Test: A Classroom Tool to Assess Power and Control in On-Screen Relationships

Despite university efforts and recent evidence-based interventions to reduce campus sexual assault, few systematic approaches have addressed how media depictions of sex and romance that inundate young adults via popular culture help to develop and sustain attitudes and behaviors that tolerate sexual abuse and intimate partner violence as normative. We introduce a feminist-informed pedagogical tool—drawing from the Duluth Power and Control Wheel and the Women's Experience with Battering Framework—to facilitate college students' decoding of relationship power, control, and harm in popular film, including dynamics relevant to sexual assault. We include step-by-step instructions for implementing the tool in classroom settings, including estimated duration, script, sample films, discussion questions, and debriefing procedures (including linking to campus assault dynamics).

Corresponding with this issue of *Family Relations* on campus sexual assault, we outline a feminist-informed classroom tool, the Abuse Litmus Test, to help college students identify relationships reflecting an imbalance of power, control, and harm in popular film, including dynamics relevant to sexual assault. Because most sexual assault takes place within known relationships (Basile, Chen, Black, & Saltzman, 2007; Truman, 2011), including in college-setting hookup relationships (Bonomi, Nichols, Kammes, & Green, 2017; Flack et al., 2016), it is critical that students have skills to decode power dynamics across sexual and nonsexual interactions (Burnett et al., 2009). Having these conversations in classrooms, using popular film as an analysis medium, opens dialogue and adds to the multiple-dose education needed to address sexual violence on college campuses (Coker et al., 2016; Nation et al., 2003; Senn et al., 2015).

Our tool is informed by two existing feminist frameworks: the Duluth Power and Control Wheel (Pence & Paymar, 1993) and the Women's Experience with Battering Framework (Smith, Tessaro, & Earp, 1995). Both of these frameworks highlight men's dominance in positions of power and authority (Giddens & Griffiths, 2006) and the link to relationship violence perpetration (Forke, Myers, Catallozzi, & Schwartz, 2008; Tharp et al., 2013). We also use intersectionality theory to note how age, race, ethnicity, gender, and being differently abled can contribute to oppression in relationships (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991).

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Review of Relevant Literature

Sexual violence occurs at high rates on college campuses; among college seniors, roughly 1 in 4 women and 1 in 20 men report victimization in the form of sexual assault since the time they entered college (Cantor et al., 2015). The corresponding rate for students identifying as transgender, genderqueer or nonconforming, or questioning is roughly 3 in 10 (Cantor et al., 2015). Students who are differently abled are also at heightened risk, with one study finding that 3.2% experienced sexual violence in the previous year, compared to 1.1% of students without disability (Scherer, Snyder, & Fisher, 2016).

In response to national attention and guidance (Anderson, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2014; White House Task Force, 2014), universities have been working to improve their approach to sexual violence (Rubin, 2015). Yet despite university efforts and recent evidence-based interventions to reduce campus sexual assault (Coker et al., 2016; Senn et al., 2015), few systematic approaches have addressed how media depictions of sex and romance that inundate young adults via popular culture (Ward, 2014) help develop and sustain attitudes and behaviors that tolerate sexual abuse and intimate partner violence as normative (Bonomi et al., 2014; Kahlor & Eastin, 2011).

Recent empirical work has found that engaging with popular culture depicting violence against women is associated with attitudes toward and experiences of sexual violence and intimate partner violence (Bonomi et al., 2014; Coyne et al., 2011; Hernandez, Weinstein, & Munoz-Labay, 2012). For example, emerging adult women who read the *Fifty Shades of Grey* novels (James, 2011) are more likely than nonreaders to experience verbal abuse and stalking by a romantic partner (Bonomi et al., 2014). Likewise, emerging adults exposed to relational aggression in the media are prone to experience romantic relational aggression (Coyne et al., 2011), and those exposed to violence against women in hip-hop culture tend to minimize interpersonal violence (Hernandez et al., 2012). Kahlor and Eastin (2011) similarly showed that soap-opera viewing is positively correlated with rape myth acceptance.

Given the associations between exposure to popular culture depicting violence against women and corresponding violence-related risks (Bonomi et al., 2014; Coyne et al., 2011; Hernandez et al., 2012; Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2012; Ward, 2002; Ward & Friedman, 2006), developing tools to facilitate college students' detection of power, control, and harm in on-screen relationships may increase awareness and dialogue about relationship abuse and sexual assault. Indeed, some research has already shown that pedagogical approaches using popular film can open dialogue with college students about sexual violence, power, and control in relationships (Bonomi, Nichols, Carotta, Perry, & Kiuchi, 2015).

Several media producers and critics have developed systems to rate popular film on the extent to which it represents gender, sexual, and racial biases (Aschwanden, 2013; Bechdel, 1986; GLAAD, 2013; John, 2013). The feminist-oriented Bechdel (1986) test has received attention because of its effective implementation in Sweden's film industry (John, 2013). The Bechdel test is a test of gender neutrality—originating in a 1985 comic titled "The Rule," in which one of Alison Bechdel's characters pronounced that she watched films only in which two named women engaged in conversation with each other about something other than men (Bechdel, 1986; John, 2013). Although empirical studies are lacking, we suspect that much popular film in the United States, if subject to the Bechdel test requiring the presence of two female characters who discuss something other than a man, would fail.

In addition to the Bechdel test (Bechdel, 1986), others have produced related work to raise awareness about violence against women and underlying problematic social structures. For example, Littlefield (2008) explored how the racialized sexualization of women of color in the media creates a context in which violence against these women is an acceptable norm. Weaver (2004) explored understandings of rape using *The Accused* (Jaffe, Lansing, & Kaplan, 1988), a film depicting a brutal gang rape. Anti-sexism activists Earp and Katz (1999) produced *Tough Guise*, a curriculum to help college and high school students identify violence against women and standards that condone it. In the curriculum, there are sections dedicated to exploring violent masculinity and sexualized violence, such as exercises that examine films depicting relationship stalking (e.g., *There's Something About Mary*; Steinberg et al., 1998). Similarly, filmmaker Byron Hurt produced *Hip Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes*

(2006), a documentary that examines the role of hip-hop in shaping masculinity, including masculinity standards that condone violence against women.

Despite prior research, documentary and curricular work aimed at raising awareness and promoting informed dialogue about violence against women, no existing brief tool (modeled in the simplicity of the Bechdel test) asks consumers of popular film to evaluate the depiction of power, control, and harm in relationships (Bonomi et al., 2014). A brief tool supported by curricular activity is needed to help college students explore and identify relationship power, control, harm, and abuse in popular film, including rape involving known partners or acquaintances (Burnett et al., 1999).

The Abuse Litmus Test

Our feminist-informed tool, the Abuse Litmus Test, fills this gap and has its roots in the Duluth Power and Control Wheel (Pence & Paymar, 1993) and Smith's Women's Experience with Battering (WEB) Framework (Smith et al., 1995). The Power and Control Wheel and the WEB Framework outline, at the interpersonal level, power and control dynamics in relationships and their associated impacts. Focusing at the interpersonal level is a useful first step for helping students start to decode power dynamics in relationships generally, and especially within sexual relationships. Both frameworks stress that sexual and physical violence in relationships stems from the patriarchal expectation that men control their partners in heterosexual relationships. Additionally, both frameworks align with nationally adopted public health conceptualizations of intimate partner and sexual violence (Breiding, Basile, Smith, Black, & Mahendra, 2015).

The Power and Control Wheel (Pence & Paymar, 1993) provides a framework for describing relationships that include sexual violence (i.e., sexual acts committed against a partner that violate consent; Breiding et al., 2015), physical violence (i.e., physical force such as hitting, slapping, kicking, choking, or use of a weapon; Breiding et al., 2015), and other behaviors that one partner uses to exert power and control over the other. For example, in such abusive relationships, the use of male privilege entitles males to treat their female partners like servants, to make all the big decisions, and to define roles in a relationship along traditional gender lines—including defining how and when sex should occur. Coercion and threats include behaviors such as threatening to leave the relationship if a partner does not follow specific rules, threatening to hurt a partner, and threatening to commit suicide. Intimidation includes making a partner feel afraid by using looks, gestures, and behaviors (e.g., damaging a partner's personal belongings). Emotional abuse includes calling a partner names, putting a partner down, making a partner feel bad, making a partner feel crazy, humiliating and inflicting guilt, and using a partner's identity (e.g., race/ethnicity) against him or her. Isolation involves controlling a partner's whereabouts, including demanding social and sexual exclusivity justified with jealousy. Minimizing, denying, and blaming include making light of the abuse in ways that suggest the victim is to blame; in sexual violence, for example, the abuser might tell the victim that the victim wanted it or that the abuser was unable to resist his or her sexual urges. Economic abuse includes controlling access to and decision making around resources.

When a partner is the recipient and target of the types of behaviors described in the Power and Control Wheel, she or he typically experiences fear, threat, loss of power and control, and pressure to adapt behaviors to meet the abuser's expectations. The WEB Framework, developed on the basis of in-depth discussions with women who are the recipients of such abusive behaviors, is a feminist synthesis of the experiences women described (Smith et al., 1995). The WEB Framework describes abused women's tendency to feel constant perceived threat (i.e., perceptions of susceptibility to harm and feelings of dread), the pressure to manage (altering behaviors to prevent and cope with abuse), an altered identity (changing self-concept and loss of self), entrapment (sense of being trapped in the abusive relationship, reinforced by the abuser's social isolation of the victim), yearning (futile efforts to establish healthy intimacy in an abusive relationship), and disempowerment (loss of power associated with sustained abuse exposure, behaviors habitually modified to match the abuser's desires; see Smith et al., 1995). Like the dynamics outlined in the WEB Framework, Burnett et al.'s (2009) analysis of rape understandings and communication on college campuses revealed that victimized women

feel disempowered, describing their experience as feeling "muted" before, during, and after a rape experience.

Overlaying the power and control tactics in the Power and Control Wheel with abuse reactions from the WEB Framework, our tool, the Abuse Litmus Test, comprises three simple and clearly defined questions accessible both to college students and to instructors who might not have extensive training in relationship abuse prevention; the questions are designed to help identify relationships characterized by unequal power, control, and harm (see Figure 1). To ensure the relevance, acceptability, and understanding of the Abuse Litmus Test, we convened two focus groups of diverse college students and instructors to critique and provide feedback.

> The three questions in the Abuse Litmus Test are:
>
> Do partners in the relationship share equal power?
> Is power used by one partner to control the other?
> Is harm suffered?

We use the analogy of a litmus test because it facilitates identifying and naming abuse, power imbalance, and harm in relationships. In chemistry, a litmus test can be used to test whether solutions are acidic, such as stomach acid or sulfuric acid in car batteries. In a chemistry litmus test, if a solution is acidic, a litmus paper turns from blue (basic alkalinity) to red (acidic). Similarly, the Abuse Litmus Test depicted in Figure 1 shows a progression of relationship equality to relationship acidity (unequal power and control, harm), as one moves through the three questions. In Figure 1, a reasonable indication of relationship acidity (abuse, power imbalance, and harm) is if a student answers no to the behaviors in Question 1 (do partners share equal power?) *and* answers yes to any of the behaviors or experiences in Questions 2 (one partner uses power to control) and 3 (harm is suffered). Importantly, in considering relationship power, one instance of a partner's name-calling or threatening behavior, or the experience of feeling trapped in a relationship, may not always signify an abusive relationship. Yet the experience of any one behavior intended to control or the experience of harm can be a critical warning sign of relationship inequity, harm, and abuse.

As feminist scholars, we recognize that the analogy of a litmus test could be perceived as imposing a hegemonic, scientific objectivity that in and of itself could obscure diverse, subjective standpoints (Harding, 1991). With that said, we recognize that many college students struggle to clearly name abuse what it is. The very act of naming abuse as *abuse* and connecting it to a litmus test, an objective measure of chemical acidity (and alkalinity), disrupts the hegemonic, patriarchal structure that has historically obscured the naming of abuse, resulting in self-doubt, isolation, and silent suffering for survivors. We purport that unambiguously defining and labeling abuse using this streamlined tool affords college students and instructors the ability to also name abuse when the label fits.

Sample Films for Use with the Abuse Litmus Test

We have found several films useful in college classrooms for facilitating dialogue on power, control, harm, and abuse in relationships in connection to the Abuse Litmus Test. Some of the films we describe here are based loosely on abuse and sexual violence paralleling real-world relationships and events, such as *Once Were Warriors* (Scholes & Tamahori, 1994) and *The Accused* (Jaffe et al., 1988). Other films, such as *Fifty Shades of Grey* (De Luca, Trigger Street, & Taylor-Johnson, 2015) and *Twilight* (Godfrey, Mooradian, Morgan, & Hardwicke, 2008), depict abuse within the context of Hollywood fantasy.

Once Were Warriors (102 minutes; Scholes & Tamahori, 1994) depicts Jake ("The Muss") Heke (Temuera Morrison) harming Beth Heke's (Rena Owen) identity, using physical and sexual violence (e.g., he beats and rapes her), along with tactics outlined in Figure 1 (e.g., inflicts male privilege by defining rigid gender roles in the relationship and treating Beth like a servant, berates her by ridiculing her Maori heritage, isolates her from family and loved ones, minimizes the abuse, uses jealousy to justify his actions). Beth's identity suffers as she alters her behaviors (e.g., lives by Jake's rules), feels trapped (and turns to alcohol to cope), and suffers physical injury.

The Color Purple (153 minutes; Jones, Kennedy, Marshall, & Spielberg, 1985) depicts Albert Johnson (Danny Glover) harming Celie Harris's (Whoopi Goldberg) identity by using physical and sexual violence (e.g., he frequently beats and rapes her), along with tactics outlined in Figure 1 (e.g., he inflicts male privilege,

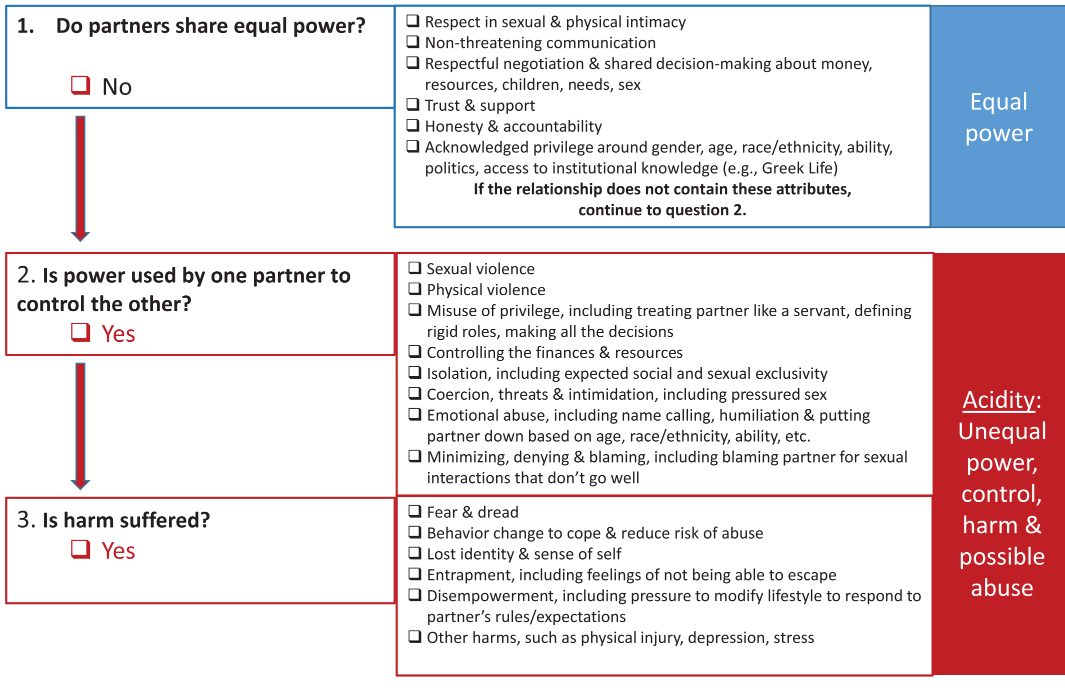

Figure 1. Abuse Litmus Test.

including forcing her to clean and care for his children; he isolates her from loved ones; he berates her physical appearance and abilities; he moves a more "attractive" woman he admires into the house and forces Celie to care for her). As Celie's identity suffers, she alters her behaviors (including rarely leaving the house) and experiences disempowerment, entrapment, and anguish (e.g., she suffers sadness and grief over a lost connection with her sister that was enforced by Albert).

What's Love Got to Do With It (118 minutes; Chapin, Krost, & Gibson, 1993) depicts Ike Turner (Laurence Fishburne) harming Tina Turner's (Angela Bassett) identity (e.g., she attempts suicide via drug overdose) by disempowering and entrapping her (e.g., she alters her behaviors to avoid "rocking the boat"). Ike uses physical and sexual violence (e.g., he rapes her after beating her) and other tactics outlined in Figure 1, such as intimidating and humiliating her by pushing cake into her face at a restaurant, berating her for trying to escape, and using jealousy to justify his actions.

The Accused (110 minutes; Jaffe et al., 1988), which communicates multiple rape discourses (Weaver, 2004), depicts three rapists along with bystanders disempowering and harming the identity of Sarah Tobias (Jodie Foster) through sexual violence (forced intercourse and sexual touching) and tactics outlined in Figure 1, such as threats and intimidation by the rapists and bystanders cheering and stoking the rape. Sarah suffers threat (before, during, and after the rape, with the bystanders continuing to harass her afterward), altered identity (she cuts her hair—an action that could be empowering but may also reflect the trauma she experienced), disempowerment (Sarah is held down while three men rape her), and physical and emotional sequelae (from the rape).

Fifty Shades of Grey (120 minutes; De Luca et al., 2015) depicts wealthy Christian Grey (Jamie Dornan) controlling Anastasia Steele (Dakota Johnson) through social isolation, intimidation, and coercion (Bonomi et al., 2015). Christian tells Anastasia she is not allowed to talk with anyone about their relationship, limits her social interactions, harasses and intimidates her about whether the men in her life are her "boyfriend," sells her car without her permission, buys her expensive

gifts (e.g., car, computer) to control her, and coerces her sexually (Bonomi, Altenburger, & Walton, 2013; Bonomi et al., 2015). Over time, Anastasia alters her behaviors (e.g., stops hanging out with friends), loses her identity (e.g., begins eating and dressing to please him), and experiences disempowerment.

Twilight (117 minutes; Godfrey et al., 2008) is a film series depicting Edward, a handsome "vampire," who stalks, socially isolates, intimidates, and uses other aspects of power and control to harm the identity of Bella, his romantic focus. Namely, Edward growls, snarls, shouts, and aggressively looks at and makes physical gestures toward her (Borgia, 2014). Some of the physical control strategies cause bruising, and at one point Edward describes to Bella how, if he ever lost control of himself, he could use his strength to kill her instantly—a threat signifying high danger in a relationship.

The film examples we provide here depict relationship acidity (unequal power and control, harm) according to the Abuse Litmus Test. In each of the film examples:

> *Do partners in the relationship share equal power?* No, the partners do not share equal power. There are multiple strategies used (e.g., sexual violence, intimidation, social isolation) by one member in each partnership to exert power and control over the other partner.
>
> *Is power used by one partner to control the other?* Yes, power is used to control a partner, for example, rape and social isolation.
>
> Is harm suffered? *Yes, harm is suffered, including lost identity, entrapment and disempowerment, and physical injury.*

Guide for Using the Abuse Litmus Test in Classroom Settings

In this section, we provide a step-by-step guide for implementing the Abuse Litmus Test in classroom settings. The activity requires 4 hours and can be divided into two classes, with the first class devoted to setting up the exercise and watching half of one of the films mentioned in the previous section, and the second class devoted to watching the second half of the film with debriefing and discussion. The materials include (a) the script, (b) the Abuse Litmus Test (see Figure 1), (c) a full-length film or film segments, and (d) a list of sexual and relationship violence resources.

Step 1 (10 Minutes): Review the Purpose of the Activity

Sample script: The purpose of today's discussion is to identify power, control, and harm in popular film relationships characterized by intimate partner violence and sexual violence (which I will define in just a minute). Some of what we discuss today could be upsetting; you or someone you know may have had an experience of intimate partner violence or sexual violence. To ensure you are connected to resources in case what we discuss is upsetting, I am providing a list of resources that help persons who have experienced sexual or intimate partner violence.

Intimate partner violence are acts used by a current for former intimate partner, such as a boyfriend or girlfriend, ex-boyfriend, or hookup partner, to cause harm, including the following:

- Physical violence such as punching, slapping, kicking, shoving, or using a weapon.
- Psychological aggression, such as using verbal and nonverbal communication with the intent to harm or control (e.g., name-calling; humiliation; threatening to hurt a partner; using intimidating looks and gestures such as damaging a partner's belongings; controlling a partner's whereabouts by constantly checking up on him or her via social media or cell phone, or demanding to know where they are at all times; and coercing or begging a partner to have sex).
- Sexual violence, which includes acts such as penetration or sexual touching against a person's freely given consent or against someone who is unable to consent.

Sexual violence occurs at high rates on college campuses, particularly among women and students who identify as transgender, genderqueer or nonconforming, questioning, and among those who are differently abled. Sexual violence includes forcing a person to engage in a sexual act (e.g., intercourse, oral sex, sexual touching, prostitution) against that person's freely given consent or when that person is unable to consent or refuse, such as when alcohol, drugs, threats, intimidation, or

physical force (e.g., holding someone down) is involved.

Relationships characterized by sexual and physical violence often involve other types of behaviors intended to control a partner. [*We encourage elaboration here; see the description of the Power and Control Wheel provided earlier; it can be accessed at http://www.theduluthmodel.org/training/wheels.html.*] Victims of power and control tactics in relationships typically suffer harm in several areas. [*We also encourage elaboration here; see the Women's Experience with Battering Framework description provided earlier*.]

Step 2 (20 Minutes): Review the Abuse Litmus Test

Sample script: The Abuse Litmus Test is a tool that can help us analyze relationship power imbalances, control, and harm. We will use popular film as an analysis medium for applying the Abuse Litmus Test. The Abuse Litmus Test includes three stem questions:

1. Do partners in the relationship share equal power?
2. Is power used by one partner to control the other?
3. Is harm suffered?

[*We refer instructors to the Abuse Litmus Test script presented earlier for elaboration. A reasonable indication of relationship acidity (unequal power and control, harm) is a no answer to the behaviors in Question 1 and a yes answer to any of the behaviors or experiences in Questions 2 and 3.*]

Step 3 (10 Minutes): Brief Introduction to Film

In Step 3, instructors should provide their audience with a brief overview of the film, including introducing each character without revealing information that could influence how the audience perceives the level of power and control of each character. We recommend that instructors view the film themselves in advance and read background material on the film.

Sample script: The films we will concentrate on today are [*announce film names*]. As we watch each film, please apply the Abuse Litmus Test by monitoring whether partners in the relationship share equal power, whether power is used by one partner to control the other, and whether harm is suffered.

Step 4 (150 Minutes): Film Viewing and Debriefing

Sample script: In the film, where did you see (a) instances of the partners sharing equal power, (b) instances of power being used to control a partner, and (c) instances when a partner suffered harm in the relationship? Were there specific instances in the relationship when someone was pressured or manipulated into participating in sexual activities—for example, someone being told by a partner that he or she is not good for anything but sex, or someone experiencing persistent begging by a partner to engage in sex? Were there aspects of the film's relationship that were confusing, or times when you were not sure about whether you were seeing abuse or violence? Were there areas in the relationship where both members exerted power and control, or where both suffered harm?

Step 5 (20 Minutes): Apply Exercise to Campus Sexual Assault

Sample script: Now we will explore aspects of what we discussed regarding relationship power, control, and harm in relation to sexual violence and assault on our campus. Are there elements of what we discussed today that you think are related to the types of sexual activity you see or are a part of on campus? Which aspects seem most relevant and applicable? Are there other films that come to mind where pressured or forced sexual activity occurred? What were the features of those films?

Step 6 (10 Minutes): Final Debriefing

The Abuse Litmus Test focuses on relationship-level behaviors and dynamics. At the broader societal level, norms that condone violence against women and other historically marginalized populations based on race, class, sexuality, ability, and politics, along with a lack of rigorous sanctions (e.g., policies, laws), create an underlying context for relationship violence and sexual assault (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). For example, in *The Accused*, the female lead (played by Jodie Foster) is gang-raped in a bar room on top of a pinball machine that portrays a

scantily clad woman. In recognition of the powerful role these social and structural processes have in relation to the attitudes and behaviors of individuals, as well as on relationship processes, an expansion of the Abuse Litmus Test could include asking additional questions, such as the following:

> Are historically marginalized populations (e.g., children, sexual minorities, women) sexually objectified, depicted as hypersexual (e.g., racial and ethnic minorities, sexual minorities, prisoners), or as lacking sexuality (e.g., people living with disability)?
>
> Are issues of race, class, sexuality, gender, ability, or immigration status used by one partner to justify abusive behaviors, or to discourage (either explicitly or tacitly) the other partner from seeking external support for problems within the relationship?
>
> Does one partner disproportionally benefit from connections to institutions of cultural power where inequities might be promoted (e.g., fraternities, sports teams, religious organizations, criminal justice system) that influence power dynamics in sexual interactions, communication processes, and other types of behavioral interactions in the relationship? Do these inequitable connections to cultural institutions undermine one of the partner's ability to access community-based support for abuse?

Additional Issues to Consider

Although the sample films we provided depict an imbalance of relationship power, control, and harm, we have experienced students attempt to minimize the abuse and harm during class discussions. For example, we have experienced students blaming Sarah Tobias's rape in *The Accused* on her being alone, drinking, and flirting with men in the bar, and justifying Celie Harris's abuse in *The Color Purple* as common to relationship dynamics in the era depicted. Minimization and denial of abuse, however, provide critical opportunities for expanded classroom discussion about what abuse means; how, when, and why we tend to minimize abuse; and how and when these understandings fit, complicate, and are resisted within our own lives. We encourage instructors using the tool to consider collaborating with women's centers and sexual assault prevention services on campus, and with community-based rape and domestic violence programs; doing so also provides students an opportunity to engage with community resources.

When using film to engage students in identifying relationship power, control, and harm, it may be important to call students' attention to film processes beyond character development that are used to impact audience interpretations—such as cinematography (e.g., the framing of the scene), lighting (e.g., to create mood, modify shapes and textures), and music (to influence our emotions and connect scenes or characters).

Conclusion

We have outlined the Abuse Litmus Test to facilitate discussions with college students about power, control, and harm that draw from feminist framings around patriarchy (Pence & Paymar, 1993; Smith et al., 1995) and the intersection with race, sexuality, different abilities, and other factors that contribute to oppression (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). Our lens is that of relationship violence, at the interpersonal level, as an important first step for helping college students decode the power dynamics in relationships they might experience or see on campus, including dynamics relevant to sexual assault. Having these conversations in classrooms opens essential dialogue and adds to the multiple-dose learning efforts needed to address sexual violence (Coker et al., 2016; Nation et al., 2003; Senn et al., 2015).

We recognize that power and control are fluid and context-specific constructs in relationships, and a perfect 50–50 split of power at all times between partners is not likely or necessarily desirable. Similarly, even in relationships where one partner has vastly more power than the other, the less powerful partner typically has primary influence, expertise, and/or authority in a select number of arenas. The overall goal of our tool is not merely to identify momentary power imbalances in intimate relationships, but also to identify when that power imbalance is disproportionate, sustained, and harmful, regardless of whether it occurs in heterosexual, same-sex, or other types of relationship configurations.

One strength of the Abuse Litmus Test is that it comprises simple and clearly defined questions accessible both to college students and to instructors who might not have extensive training in relationship abuse and sexual assault.

Focusing on the three questions in the Abuse Litmus Test will facilitate the identification of abuse amid cultural representations that might normalize violence, open campus dialogue about the underlying power and control dynamics that characterize abusive relationships, and add to the many efforts needed to stop campus assault. As noted, we encourage instructors to collaborate with women's centers and other sexual assault prevention services.

The Abuse Litmus Test focuses on relationship-level behaviors and dynamics. Within the broader ecology, societal norms that tolerate violence against women and other historically marginalized populations that is based on race, class, sexuality, ability, and politics, along with a lack of rigorous sanctions (e.g., policies, laws), create an underlying context for relationship violence, sexual assault, and oppression (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Heise, 1998). Although we have offered questions to help instructors using the Abuse Litmus Test discuss broader cultural influences within film, we also encourage the use of existing curricula such as *Tough Guise* (1999) and the documentary *Hip Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes* (2006) because they address the role of popular culture messaging across these broader socio-ecological levels. To add to these well-established curricula, we envision that a tool similar to the Abuse Litmus Test could be developed to help students pinpoint how historically marginalized populations are objectified and sexually stigmatized within popular media—and this practice's connection to the normalization of violence based on historical and institutionalized power imbalances.

In our experience as college instructors, some students struggle to name abuse in popular media, such as in the situation where Chris Brown assaulted Rihanna (Stephens & Eaton, 2016) and in popular film such as *Fifty Shades of Grey* (Bonomi, Nichols, Carotta, Perry, & Kiuchi, 2015), even when what is depicted meets legal definitions of sexual or relationship violence. We anticipate that the use of the Abuse Litmus Test will assist students with identifying when a relationship crosses the line to being abusive. We also anticipate that wide-scale adoption of the Abuse Litmus Test in college settings across the county will help to normalize discussions about healthy relationship expectations and add to the swell of consciousness occurring among college students, which has resulted in demands that college environments be free of relationship and sexual violence.

Importantly, we did not develop the Abuse Litmus Test to replace existing programming on college campuses or existing pedagogical approaches such as *Tough Guise* and *Hip Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes*, but rather to supplement them. For example, we recognize that many college campuses in the United States have multifaceted sexual and relationship violence prevention programming (e.g., the Sexual and Relationship Violence program at Michigan State University) to educate students in abuse dynamics. Some campuses have adopted evidence-based bystander intervention programs, such as Green Dot (Coker et al., 2016). To ensure the most comprehensive approach to the pervasive social problem of sexual and relationship violence, ideally multiple strategies will be tried and evaluated on campuses nationwide.

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