

Women recognize abuse in 'Fifty Shades' film

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'The encouraging news is that these young women are identifying aspects of an unhealthy relationship' between the main characters in the movie 'Fifty Shades of Grey,' said Amy Bonomi, a nationally known expert on intimate partner violence at Michigan State University. Credit: Michigan State University

Young adult women who watched "Fifty Shades of Grey" found the relationship between the characters Christian and Anastasia somewhat exciting and romantic, but also expressed grave concerns about Christian's abusive behavior, new research finds.

A study by Michigan State University scholars suggests [women](#) aged 18-24—a prime period for exploring love and sexuality—are able to recognize a harmful [relationship](#) marked by controlling and manipulative behavior, stalking and emotional and [sexual abuse](#).

"The encouraging news is that these [young women](#) are identifying aspects of an unhealthy relationship between Christian and Anastasia," said lead author Amy Bonomi, chairperson and professor of MSU's Department of Human Development and Family Studies. "They were keenly aware of the different aspects of [abuse](#) in the relationship and told us in great detail the danger the abuse poses for Anastasia."

Between 24 percent and 44 percent of women will experience [domestic violence](#) in their lifetime, with negative health outcomes ranging from long-term injuries to substance abuse to depression.

For the study, which appears in the *Journal of Women's Health*, 35 college-aged women participated in focus groups immediately after watching "Fifty Shades." The hit movie, based on E.L. James' best-

selling novel, depicts the seduction of Anastasia, a college student, by Christian, a rich businessman.

A previous study led by Bonomi found that the novel perpetuates violence against women. With the current research, she and her fellow researchers set out to examine young women's perceptions of the relationship patterns in the film and what behaviors might be alarming in their own relationship.

While study participants were able to identify Christian's abuse of Anastasia, they also were sympathetic and rationalized his behavior as a function of his personality, affluence and his own sexual abuse as a child.

Further, some participants blamed Anastasia for not "speaking up" about the abuse. This reflects a lack of understanding in society about the dynamics of domestic violence and why victims frequently stay with their abusers after making unsuccessful attempts to leave, Bonomi said.

"This finding fits with the societal narrative that basically puts the blame back on the victim," Bonomi said. "In reality, there are many barriers and safety issues related to attempts to end abusive relationships. The most dangerous time for a victim is when the abuser finds out the victim may be leaving. It takes women an average of seven to eight attempts before they leave their abuser."

More information: [online.liebertpub.com/doi/full ...
0.1089/jwh.2015.5318](http://online.liebertpub.com/doi/full/10.1089/jwh.2015.5318)

Provided by Michigan State University

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