

where on the line? the continuum between sexual choice and coercion

OVERVIEW: Students place case studies on the continuum between forced sex and voluntary and desired sex and discuss the right to say no. (Note: Students should have some understanding of sexual violence and consent before you conduct this activity.)

OBJECTIVES: To enable students to describe the continuum of sexual choices; to recognize cases where sex is voluntary but not wanted; to clearly understand the right to say no to sex; to strengthen abstract thinking skills.

DURATION:

45 minutes

MATERIALS:

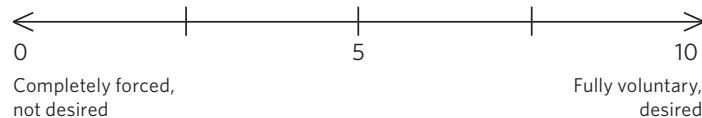
Board+chalk; copies of the selected case studies; a long piece of rope or sturdy string; paper clips (or tape); colored markers, if available.

TO PREPARE:

Modify the handout as indicated (see “Case Studies in Sexual Choice and Sexual Coercion”). Make four copies of the set of case studies you select.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Attach the string horizontally across the room. At one end label: “Completely forced, not desired” and at the other end label: “Fully voluntary, desired.”



- 2 Introduce the topic and explain that there is a continuum between sex that is forced and completely undesired and sex that is fully voluntary and desired. Ask:
 - What do we call sex that is forced? *After they respond, add the word “rape” at that end of the continuum.*
 - If a person agrees to have sex, does that always mean that he or she actually wants to have sex? *After they respond, ask: When sex is voluntary but not really wanted, would that be at one end of the string or somewhere in between the two ends?*

- 3 Divide students into four groups. Give each group the handout and a set of paper clips. Explain:
 - Read over each scenario in your group. Then talk it over and decide where on the string — the 0–10 continuum — you think the case study falls.
 - Mark the case with your names [*with a colored marker if available*]. Then attach it with a paper clip at the place on the string where you have decided it fits.
- 4 Circulate among the groups and offer help. Allow them to spend extra time discussing their views even if they do not complete all the case studies.
- 5 After 15 minutes, ask someone from one group to read the first case study and explain where on the 0–10 continuum his/her group put it and why. Allow two to three minutes for the other groups to indicate where they put it on the continuum; encourage them to discuss any differences of opinion. Repeat this process for each case study.

6 Reserve ten minutes at the end to discuss the following questions:

- Forcing someone to have unwanted sex is a violation of that person's human rights. By a show of hands, who believes that forced sex is common among young people? Who thinks it is rare?
- We discussed that a person who does not want to have sex and is not forced into it may still voluntarily engage in sex. Who believes this is a fairly common experience among young people? Who thinks it is rare? *[Note whether boys respond to this question similarly to how girls respond.]*
- Are girls and boys equally likely to have sex in a situation that is not forced but also not desired? *[Probe: Do you think girls and boys usually share equal power in sexual relationships? What about adult men and women?]* *[Note: Emphasize that even if a situation does not fall at the extreme "forced" end of the spectrum it may, nonetheless, be unacceptable.]*
- Does a person always know whether his or her partner really wants to have sex? What are some ways to be sure? *[Probe for: Ask the person! Talking it over together beforehand is best. What if you ask and your partner is not sure what he or she wants?]*

case studies in sexual choice and sexual coercion

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE TEACHER: Select six to eight of the following case studies (or write your own case studies). Be sure that your final selection includes at least one case in which a boy feels pressured to have sex. Modify them to be suitable and meaningful for your students.

MOHAMMED and **AMMA:** Mohammed wants to have sex but his wife Amma does not feel like it tonight. She has been taught that it is a wife's duty to have sex whenever her husband wants it unless she feels sick or is menstruating, so she has sex with Mohammed.

NINA and **CARL:** Nina, age 22, has been going out with Carl for about six months. He has told her several times that he really wants to have sex with her, but only if she wants to. Nina feels unsure but she thinks that she should do what her boyfriend wants. She knows other young women have sex with their boyfriends and is concerned that he might leave her if she doesn't, although Carl has never threatened to do so. The next time they are intimate, they have sex.

JACOB and **GRACE:** Jacob and his girlfriend Grace are alone at his parents' house. Jacob, drunk and slurring his words, lies down on the floor. Grace, who also had a bit to drink, lies down next to him. Feeling uninhibited, she takes the initiative and has oral sex with him. Jacob feels confused and is not sure what to say. He doesn't remember anything the next day.

HENRY and **MARIA:** Henry and Maria have been kissing passionately. When Henry starts to undress Maria, she tries to stop him and says, "No." Henry thinks she wants more but that she is worried about admitting it. So he keeps trying. After trying to push Henry away and saying "no" for five minutes, she eventually stops struggling and just lies there. Henry goes ahead and has intercourse with her.

AJIT and **ANILA:** Ajit and Anila have met only a couple of times, always with supervision. Ajit seems like a good person so Anila agrees when her parents tell her that Ajit wants to marry her. Anila has been taught that everything related to sex is shameful. She has heard that it hurts the first time and will make her bleed. She is really scared. She hardly knows Ajit and feels ashamed at the thought of his touching her body. She isn't interested in having sex and doesn't feel excited, but she knows that when you get married, you must have sex on the wedding night. She lets Ajit have sex with her.

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SELAH and **JAMES**: The last time Selah refused her husband James, he threatened her and beat her badly, giving her a black eye. She doesn't want to have sex with James today but he might beat her again, so she doesn't refuse.

LIN and **YANG**: Lin's boyfriend Yang is really pressuring her to have sex. She knows that she doesn't really want to do it, but she came with Yang alone to this secluded place. Thinking it is inevitable, she just lets Yang do what he wants without saying anything.

TEO and **HELENA**: Teo and Helena are classmates at university. They have been dating for a few months and are very attracted to each other. They are not deeply in love but they agree that they want to have sex. After agreeing to use a condom, they have sexual intercourse.

GINA and **AHMED**: Gina comes from a poor family. She works in a shop for Ahmed and her salary is her family's main income. One day Ahmed starts touching her and after the shop closes, he pulls her into the storeroom in the back and lifts up her dress. Gina is confused, and frightened about losing her job. She starts to resist but when Ahmed says, "What? You don't like working here?" she gives in.

JULIA and **OSCAR**: Oscar is not sure if he really wants to have sex with Julia, but Julia suggested it and he is afraid that his friends will find out and tease him if he says no. He goes ahead.

PETER and **LAURA**: Peter often buys Laura gifts and other things she needs. Tonight they went out for dinner and he paid. Even though Laura doesn't feel ready to have sex, she feels that she owes it to Peter. She doesn't refuse him.

VERA and **WILLIAM**: Vera and William have had sex once before. Tonight, William tells Vera that he has been wanting her all day. Vera would rather just hang out and talk, but she thinks that since they did it once, there is no going back. When William starts to take off his clothes, Vera says nothing to him and they have sex again.

EMMA and **ROBERT**: One evening Emma drank a lot. Robert finds her lying on the bed, passed out cold. He takes off her clothes and has sex with her. She doesn't wake up.