



ON (NOT) SPEAKING THE SAME LANGUAGE:
**UNDERSTANDING HOW
COLLEGE STUDENTS DESCRIBE
INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE**



On (**Not**) Speaking the Same Language:
**Understanding How College Students
Describe Intimate Partner Violence**

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ABSTRACT/EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Intimate Partner Violence/Dating and Sexual Violence (IPV/DSV) impacts significant numbers of students on college and university campuses across the U.S. (Cantor et al., 2019). Unfortunately, college students may not identify their experiences with IPV/DSV as such because the language they use to describe their experiences may differ from educational and policy materials university administrators use to describe IPV/DSV. Without a shared vocabulary, students may be missing out on important education or resources related to IPV/DSV, minimize their own or their peers' experiences with violence, and be at increased risk for violence.

Utilizing case study methodology, we collected data during the 2020-21 academic year to better understand how students at the University of Utah discuss and describe IPV/DSV. Our interdisciplinary team of

researchers conducted 21 focus groups with 53 students, analyzed 106 campus policies, and reviewed program descriptions for 11 campus educational resources related to IPV/DSV.

We found that students and researchers, educators, and administrators often do not share a language related to domestic violence, dating violence, and sexual assault. Students tend to describe their experiences through specific behaviors (e.g., manipulation and controlling behaviors), rather than terminology encompassing those behaviors (e.g., domestic violence). Through this report, we provide an overview of the language students use to describe IPV/DSV and recommendations for further improving policy and education as it relates to addressing IPV/DSV among college students.



A Note on Language

This very study focuses on the importance of a shared language to address intimate partner violence, dating violence, and sexual violence among college students, yet we struggle to know what terms to use to ensure that readers understand which issues we are attempting to address. As highlighted by the students we interviewed, *intimate partner violence* tends to be the term used by academics to explore a large number of experiences related to coerced, forced, or otherwise unsafe or unhealthy experiences in sexual and romantic relationships. College students interviewed

in this study connected more with the terms *dating violence* and *sexual violence* as descriptive of their own and their peers' experiences. Therefore, in this report, we use the terms intimate partner violence and dating and sexual violence (IPV/DSV) together to attempt to reach researchers and students alike. We use IPV/DSV as an umbrella term to encompass a number of experiences: dating or domestic violence (including emotional, financial, mental, cyber, and physical abuse); rape; sexual assault; stalking; and digital abuse.



BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

In the 2018-19 academic year, three women affiliated with the University of Utah (“the U”)—Lauren McCluskey, Sarah Hawley, and MacKenzie Lueck—were murdered by former dating partners, spouses, or acquaintances. Each of these tragedies illuminated various aspects of the problem of intimate partner violence and continue to impact the campus community as it relates to perceptions of “campus safety.” Unfortunately, one of the biggest challenges associated with addressing IPV/DSV among college students is that students, educators, and administrators continue to address IPV/DSV as a generic campus safety (i.e., stranger danger) issue, rather than an issue of safe and healthy relationships.

IPV/DSV happens at alarming rates among college students, and impacts minoritized people (e.g., people of color, queer and trans people, and people with disabilities) at even higher rates than their dominant group peers. For example, in the most recent AAU campus climate study at the U, perpetrators of violence targeted bisexual women at exceedingly high rates for sexual assault: 31% of bisexual women compared with 19% of heterosexual women reported experiencing sexual assault. Further, perpetrators target people managing disabilities at very high rates as well: 33% of women and 25.5% of transgender people with chronic mental health concerns reported experiencing sexual assault. Of students in partnered relationships, 14.1% of women, 10.1% of men, and 21.5% of transgender people reported experiencing controlling behaviors from partners (Cantor et al., 2019).

Although IPV/DSV impacts college students at alarming rates, IPV/DSV is frequently mis/identified by the victim, perpetrator, and members of people’s support systems (Halvaka, 2014; Sabina & Ho, 2014; Sylaska & Edwards, 2015; Sylaska & Edwards, 2014).

Perceptions of IPV/DSV vary widely, as sociocultural factors shape individuals’ definitions of IPV/DSV and the labeling of certain behaviors as “abusive” or “violent” (Nordin, 2021, p. 2). Students in minoritized communities (e.g., queer and trans students, students of color, students with disabilities) may also have different conceptualizations than students in dominant communities (deHeer & Jones, 2017).

Further, students’ beliefs about and experiences with dating or relationship violence may result in minimizing their own or their peers’ experiences with harm. For instance, as previous studies have noted, the term domestic violence does not accurately represent student experience since most college couples do not live together (Lederman & Stewart, 2003). Similarly, many behaviors that professionals might consider harmful or abusive, students may consider a normal part of dating. For example, sharing social media passwords and tracking partners’ locations are viewed as “dating norms” among many students (Cusano et al., 2020, p. 10). Further sexual scripts, or socialized gendered behaviors in relationships, contribute to students’ minimization of harmful behaviors as routine dating and relationship patterns (Hlvaka, 2014).

How university administrators, educators, and researchers discuss IPV/DSV may not correspond to students’ understanding of terms. This disconnect may result in students’ not recognizing behavior as dangerous or concerns as legitimate (Edwards et al., 2011). We argue that this disconnect of terminology and understanding has far-reaching implications for research on IPV/DSV and prevention measures. Good faith attempts to educate students and make them aware of resources are encouraging; however, when educators and students employ a different language to talk about a shared problem, the problem will persist

(as in the case of IPV/DSV among college students). To contribute to a shared language, we conducted a case study focused on student understandings of IPV/DSV and how they make sense of related experiences. Ultimately, understanding how students perceive, talk about, experience, and counsel one another around issues of IPV/DSV will inform more effective efforts to make college campuses (and our larger community) safer.



METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

Our research team included three faculty members, three graduate students, and three undergraduate students, from six different disciplines. Each of the faculty members led one aspect of the data collection (outlined below), and all the student team members conducted focus groups with students after training and practice. The research team met twice monthly throughout the course of data collection to discuss our progress and adjust the protocol as necessary. We collected and analyzed data during a global pandemic, which affected our research processes in significant ways. We conducted focus groups virtually, using Zoom. And all our research team meetings took place via Zoom; in fact, some of us have never met each other in person.

We employed a case study methodology (Stake, 1995) to better understand how college students describe and discuss issues of IPV/DSV. Effective case study methodology requires researchers to engage in a variety of data collection strategies to explore research questions from many angles. In this study, we employed three distinct data collection strategies to explore our research questions: an inventory and review of educational programs and resources, analysis of policy related to sexual misconduct, and focus groups with students to better understand how they conceptualize IPV/DSV.

INVENTORY OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES

We conducted a comprehensive review of the university's current educational programs (including orientation programs, fraternity/sorority programs, and athletic programs) that offer information about relationship, dating, and sexual violence. To emulate how students might seek university resources (help or information), we chose educational programs based on a search within the university's website. For example, we searched terms, such as sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence, domestic abuse, and sexual violence. Based on these searches, we identified six offices or centers collaborating to offer six programs that provide information to students about IPV/DSV (and one center that doesn't have a specific program, but provides counseling to survivors of IPV/DSV).

The offices and programs we reviewed included the following:

OFFICE	PROGRAM
Office of Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action, and Title IX (OEO Office)	New Employee Orientation Addressing Sexual Misconduct Brochure
Office of the Dean of Students	Addressing Sexual Misconduct Brochure
Office of Orientation & Transition	New Student Orientation
Center for Student Wellness	ACES Peer Health Education, Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Presentations
Women's Resource Center	N/A
U Safety	Safe U website

INVENTORY OF POLICY AND PRACTICE

Similarly, we conducted a comprehensive review of current university policies and practices used in responding to acts of IPV/DSV (i.e., campus adjudication practices, processes for reporting, Clery reporting). We reviewed the Regulations Library at the U, and opened each policy, rule, guideline, and regulation and searched for commonly identified terms that flag behaviors of intimate partner violence (e.g., “assault,” “violence,” “abuse,” “stalking”). Furthermore, if there were any hyperlinks or cross-referenced policies within the given policy, we followed those links to identify additional policies that may address IPV/DSV-related issues. We identified 106 policies, rules, and guidelines that addressed an abusive behavior or component of IPV/DSV response at the university.

FOCUS GROUPS

We used Zoom to conduct 21 focus groups with 53 students over the course of five months (October 2020 through February 2021). The focus group questions primarily focused on understanding students’ associations with particular words or phrases related to IPV/DSV (e.g., “intimate partner violence,” “relationship violence,” “domestic violence,” “sexual assault”).

The shift to the online environment may have had some positive effects on research, including people possibly being more comfortable sharing from the comfort of their homes (Howlett, 2021), yet the fact that we could not go to students where they were to engage with them in their usual campus environments impacted our ability to reach students beyond the typical cisgender white heterosexual women (who are likely survivors of violence themselves) who typically volunteer to participate in studies like this one (Harris et al., 2020; Linder et al., 2020). For example, we intended to visit the cultural centers, the LGBT resource center, and other spaces where historically minoritized students congregate to introduce ourselves and invite participation in the study. Because we could not do that, our recruitment efforts suffered tremendously, resulting in a relatively homogenous group of participants.

The demographics of students in the focus groups are summarized below:



College Level	
Undergraduate	46
Graduate	7
Racial/Ethnic Identity	
White	38
Asian	9
Latinx	3
Multiracial	2
Middle Eastern	1
Gender	
Cis Women	39
Cis Men	8
Nonbinary	1
No Answer	5
Sexual Orientation	
Straight	38
Bisexual	9
Gay, Lesbian	2
Queer/Questioning	4
Religious Affiliation	
Atheist/Agnostic	25
Christian (Non-LDS)	9
LDS	6
Buddhist	4
Muslim	3
Spiritual	4
No Answer	2
Major	
Business	7
Social Science	10
Sociology	13
Psychology	10
Science and Engineering	8
Communication	3
Fine Arts	1
Undecided	1

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to better understand how college students describe and discuss issues of IPV/DSV to provide recommendations for university educators and administrators to better reach students. In this section, we highlight the findings from our study that focus on language: students' language and perceptions of key terms, and the language present in university documents and educational programs. Our findings indicate that students' language focuses on specific behaviors, and language in university documents overwhelmingly focuses on legal issues related to IPV/DSV.

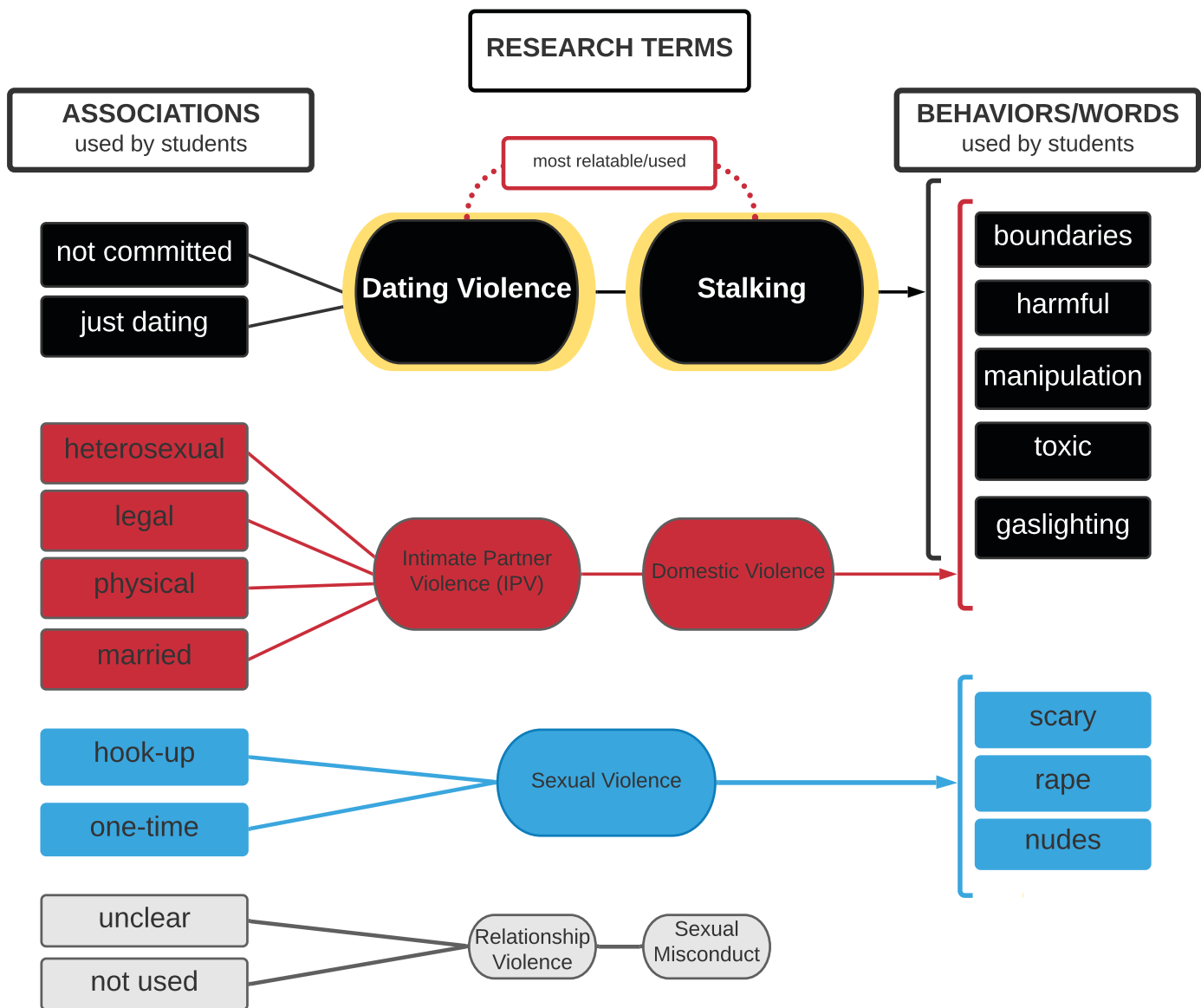


Figure 1

STUDENTS' LANGUAGE AND PERCEPTIONS

The primary purpose of this study was to better understand how college students make meaning of and talk about issues of IPV/DSV. Specifically, we asked students to respond to the following terms: intimate partner violence, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual violence, and sexual misconduct. We learned that students do prefer some terms related to IPV/DSV over others, yet they recommended that we describe specific behaviors, rather than overarching terms, when discussing IPV/DSV. We further explored with students their perceptions of campus safety given that the term campus safety seems to be the one that continually emerges in media and other messaging. In this section, we explore the ways college students in our study discussed a variety of terms and behaviors, and the relationships between the terms and behaviors. See Figure 1 for a visual representation of the relationships between the terms.

As depicted by the figure, students generally categorized intimate partner violence and domestic violence together and noted that intimate partner violence and domestic violence generally included physical assaults, though some students also acknowledge the emotional and mental aspects of intimate partner violence and domestic violence. Closely related, the term dating violence seemed to hold the most relevance to students' lives, and they associated stalking, emotional, and mental abuse with the term dating violence. Students held complex understandings of specific behaviors associated with dating violence including gaslighting, emotional manipulation, obsessive and controlling behaviors, stalking, and degrading a partner's physical appearance or intelligence.

Students thought of sexual violence as separate from intimate partner violence, domestic violence, and dating violence, and they noted that sexual violence included sexual assault and rape. Additionally, students



associated issues of technological abuse, including revenge porn and sharing “nudes” without permission, with sexual violence. Students associated sexual violence with one-time engagements (e.g., one date or hookup), while dating violence happened in longer-term or ongoing relationships.

Students reported the terms sexual misconduct and relationship violence, frequently used by university administrators, were vague and held little meaning to them.

We explore these terms in more depth in the following sections.

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Students indicated that the term intimate partner violence was a term used by academics and rarely held any specific meaning for them outside of an academic space. Some students primarily identified intimate partner violence as a research term.

"I feel like intimate partner violence is a very academic term, and that's what you would use in research the majority of the time."

– Adrienne

"I've only heard this type of phrase when I started my criminology courses, never before that."

– Rose

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Students in our study associated the term domestic violence with **physical abuse**, **police and legal issues**, and specifically related the term to **heterosexual** married couples. The term seemed to have little relevance to students' lives.

"I think when I hear domestic violence, I have this image of this old married couple. I think that that's a term that was used a lot more historically, and now I feel like it's shifted."

– Flora

Physical Abuse & Police and Legal Issues

"I guess when I hear the police responded to a domestic violence case or something like that, I automatically assume more physical violence rather than emotional... so when you hear domestic violence, you kind of automatically know it's a very bad situation."

– Hannah

"It's almost the most politically correct term or, like, cops use it, for example for a domestic dispute. I think of it as very violent, like physical assault rather than in a relationship, like that manipulation. And I know that that can have different forms of violence, but... I think of people being in a physically violent situation."

– Sally

Heterosexual Couples

"Domestic violence is also a real charge you can get. Like, I don't think you can be charged for, like, relationship violence. I think it falls under and I also feel like it just is physical assault... I also tend to think of domestic violence more with like heterosexual couples, 'cause I've seen it more with a husband and wife and there's more stories about it."

– Sophie

DATING VIOLENCE

The term *dating violence* resonated the most out of the terms we explored with the students in our study, and students described very specific behaviors with the term. Students provided numerous examples of **manipulative and threatening, obsessive and controlling**, and **technology-related** behaviors throughout the focus groups.

Manipulative & Threatening

"They scare you into thinking that if you leave them, they're going to kill themselves. Or if you leave them, something bad is going to happen. And that just takes such a mental toll on you that you forget everything, the reasons why you want to break up and the bad things they've done, to where it's just like, 'Oh, I need to stay with this person to make sure they're safe regardless of what they've done.'"

– Emma

"My ex would just do these threats that were very aggressive... that were kind of scary. I remember my ex would break stuff next to me to show dominance, but it was in a threatening way. I feel like it was a message to show dominance, to show what could happen if I messed up or something."

– G

"I think another one that comes to mind with my friend I previously mentioned, after their fight had broken out, one thing that was said was, since he is an illegal immigrant, she said, 'Well, I'm just going to tell them to ship you out. I don't care anymore.' And that's extremely dangerous in that sense, that it could just ruin his life completely."

– Atlas

Obsessive & Controlling

"I guess the obsessiveness... from just what I've personally seen, it's a lot of times kind of almost seen as romantic at first, where it's like if someone gets jealous over you, that's seen as really sweet and 'They like me so much,' and then that leads to an unhealthy place."

– Laura

"Yeah. Another thing that could also be the controlling aspect is, obviously, they want to know who you're with, where you're going, blah, blah, blah. All that good stuff. Then also there could be a thing where they have to constantly, I don't know, check your phone maybe to see who you're texting, what you're doing on your phone, or they're constantly asking you what you're doing. They just need to trust you, but some people just get really obsessive and I don't really know why."

– Hailey

"I know that I've had a past relationship where I was being micromanaged. Essentially, that was really invading both my personal space and just boundaries by being, 'Where are you? Who are you with? Don't text this person. You need to be home this time. This is what you're going to wear today.'"

– Marie

“And he thought that it was in his power to take things from her to keep her fit. So things that she had bought at the grocery store would go missing from the fridge if it wasn’t healthy. Snacks from her room would go missing and be found in the garbage can a couple of days later. And to me, that starts to affect your physical body. And for me, that’s physical violence. You’re starving her to death or you’re starving her because you don’t think she should gain more weight.”

– Marie

Technology-Related

“Another thing I would add to that is cyber-stalking... he would create a lot of different social media accounts to talk to me and text me from different numbers, leave me voicemails from different numbers, and send me a bunch of emails from emails that he created. And it made me feel very unsafe and especially paranoid online, knowing that anybody that messaged me or friended me could have been him.”

– Mavis

“I think for me, the bouncing back on the whole social media thing that I’ve noticed is this interaction of managing or maintaining each other’s online followers or friendships. A lot of people will ask their partner to block someone or unfriend someone because they may have left a nice comment or a like... and I think it’s just a really messy and abusive system where one person tries to control the other out of jealousy.”

– Gray



SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Students in this study also understood and resonated with the term sexual violence yet for the most part distinguished it from dating violence. Most considered dating violence to be behaviors that happen in ongoing relationships, while sexual violence was more likely to happen in one-time situations, like a date or a hookup. Students primarily associated sexual violence with **rape and sexual assault** (though as in the example below, this sometimes overlapped with relationship manipulation), and they noted the **long-term consequences** of sexual violence in ways they did not discuss consequences for other forms of violence.

Rape and Sexual Assault

“When I hear sexual violence, I immediately think of, like, rape and unwanted touching, kissing anything, and also being, like, forced to. So, rape or being forced to kiss someone, or someone pressuring you into it to the point where, like, you feel like you can’t say no or else you might be hurt or be forced to, so you just kind of give in. So that’s what I think of when I think of sexual violence. I think it is the scariest and is always uncomfortable situations.”

– Emma

“I think if you use the word sexual violence, most people are going to imagine someone forcing themselves on somebody else. Whereas when I think sexual violence, I think of coercing someone in a relationship, essentially being, ‘Oh, if you don’t sleep with me, I won’t love you.’ ...It’s more of the manipulation or abuse of the relationship.”

– Roger

Long-Term Consequences

“The psychological trauma that’s caused due to anything pertaining to sexual violence, not even just coming from the partner or whoever that caused it, but coming from outsiders who are not really doing anything about it or not really listening to all their concerns... that can really impact someone’s psyche on such a level that would make them unable to do anything.”

– Atlas

“I think if you look at statistics and how people that have been sexually abused or the violence in a sexual relationship seems to really affect more than just the physical aspect of it, there’s a lot of emotional baggage that comes along with all of that as well. So, for me although I think any type of violence is horrible, I think that sexual violence seems to have a lot more long-lasting damage. I don’t know what the word is I want to say, but damages to the person a little more. It’s a little deeper.”

– Shirley



SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

Students responded to the term *sexual misconduct* with confusion. Sexual misconduct is used throughout university policies and educational programming related to policy, yet students indicate the term is **vague**, and some believe it **minimizes** the significance of IPV/DSV-related issues.

Vague

“There is still so much gray area, especially with sexual misconduct. It is such a broad term that, if you were to report this, or you think, ‘Did I experience sexual misconduct,’ you might not relate to the term, because it holds, maybe, so many different meanings and is such a broad word that you might think, like, ‘I don’t know if I experienced sexual misconduct,’ but you definitely feel uncomfortable, you definitely did not consent to whatever happened to you, and you probably totally did experience sexual misconduct. But I think maybe we need more, almost explicit words.”

– Beagles

Minimizes Significance

“I think conversations around that, where we kind of chalk everything up to sexual misconduct or inappropriate conduct, instead of actually calling it what it ends up being, is something that comes to mind as a minimizing activity around this.”

– Nicole

CAMPUS SAFETY

When discussing the concept of *campus safety*, most participants described examples of generic crime or “stranger danger.” Students described being scared of a “random” or “strange” person and regularly connected campus safety with **safety at night**. Students referenced darkness, nighttime classes, and lighting. The word “night” is mentioned 24 times in focus group excerpts about campus safety.

Random or Strange People

“It feels like campus safety is more like a huddle, like we’re all trying to keep each other safe from the outside and maintain strong relationships within, but it doesn’t really seem to talk about if your roommate is causing problems, what kind of actions you should take for that? It does feel more like, don’t walk alone at night because what if someone random walks into campus? Instead of being like, it could be someone from your class, it could be someone within the campus.”

– Aurora

Lighting, Night & Darkness

“I’ve heard of other schools having like little things 10 feet away from each other where you can like call the police and it tracks where you are. And just seeing more things like that on campus would show me personally that the campus is more safe.”

– Sophie

“I think for me, something that campus could do to make me feel more safe is a lot more lighting at night. I always have a really big fear of sexual assault on campus because rapes on campuses happen way too often and often aren’t ever really solved.”

– Mae

“I always just think of nighttime campus not daytime campus because of usually the things that, like, I kind of see that the U particularly, or any university, struggles with is that like nighttime students walking to campus on their own or having to be on campus by themselves in the dark.”

– Gwen



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TIMES THE WORD “NIGHT”
IS MENTIONED
IN FOCUS GROUP EXCERPTS
ABOUT CAMPUS SAFETY

LANGUAGE IN UNIVERSITY DOCUMENTS

So that we could determine whether current practices on our campus align with students' understanding of IPV/DSV, we also reviewed university policies and educational programs to see how they discuss IPV/DSV. As indicated earlier, we reviewed 106 policies and 11 educational programs. Most policy documents included a focus on "sexual misconduct" or even more broad terms like "harassment" (which included all kinds of identity-based harassment, including racial harassment, harassment based on sexual identity, etc.). The language in educational programs varied, depending on the office with which it was affiliated.

OVERVIEW OF POLICY FINDINGS

We identified a total of 106 university policies that related to IPV/DSV. The terms that the majority of policies focused on included sexual violence/assault (n=88). Instead of policies addressing just one topic, they usually included a "catch-all" approach where a large array of terms were implemented to capture a group of concerns. For example, sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, and gender-based discrimination/harassment were terms that frequently came up yet were rarely by themselves. Most of the policies address sexual violence in combination with other behaviors, address a broad audience (e.g., everyone affiliated with the university), and involve a reaction to behavior(s) rather than prevention. Of the 106 policies, the terms most commonly used addressed sexual violence/assault (n=88). "Sexual misconduct" (n=41), "sexual harassment" (n=41), and "gender-based discrimination/harassment" (n=8) were frequent terms used in policies that targeted sexual violence/assault issues. Twenty-one policies focused on addressing a single term (e.g., sexual misconduct), while the majority of policies (n=67; 63.2%) combined terms that addressed sexual violence (e.g., sexual misconduct, sexual offenses, and sexual exploitation). For example, in one policy, multiple terms were included: discrimination, harassment, sexual

misconduct, sexual offenses, and sexual exploitation. While the targeted topic was discrimination, this particular example would fall under the "combined terms" category (n=67) where multiple behaviors were encompassed in a single policy. However, in one of the policies/procedures in the College of Social Work handbook, the only term—and focus of the policy—was "sexual harassment."

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POLICIES INCLUDE RESPONSE INFORMATION

6

ADDRESS PREVENTION

The majority of policies (n=79) were nonspecific and "targeted" everyone affiliated with the university—faculty, students, athletics, and those participating at events at the U. Just 20 of the 106 policies addressed only students (graduate and undergraduate). The majority of policies (67.92%; n=72) did not include diversity in experiences of groups of people targeted at the U. Instead, policies that were included to mention "diversity" did not explicitly do so, but instead mentioned groups that have been historically marginalized in the U.S. context (e.g., primarily racial/ethnic minorities and sexual minorities) or framed policies related to group discrimination. Lastly, 74 of the policies (69.81%) included information in response to IPV/DSV, with only three focusing explicitly on the prevention of IPV/DSV, and yet they were victim-/survivor-related and not prevention methods for perpetrators of violence. A large portion of the policies (n=25) included both general information on what to do following IPV/DSV and prevention of IPV/DSV. The prevention component in these combination policies primarily included terminology that set up what would happen if someone broke the rule in order to prevent someone from enacting violence yet did not necessarily provide much more "prevention" beyond that.

While there are many reasons for the current policies in place at the university, the focus on certain behaviors, certain populations, and response rather than prevention likely has an implication for how those on campus perceive issues of interpersonal violence on campus.

OVERVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS FINDINGS

In reviewing the texts affiliated with various educational programs on campus, we discovered a language difference between programs that come from the Center for Student Wellness and programs that come from the Offices of Equal Opportunity (OEO) and the Office of the Dean of Students (ODOS). Materials associated with the OEO and ODOS frequently employed the legal terms needed for accountability and reporting, such as sexual misconduct. Conversely, materials and programs organized by the Center for Student Wellness used terms like sexual wellness, harm reduction, and violence prevention.

For instance, the website for the ODOS (<https://deanofstudents.utah.edu/>) includes links to report several types of misconduct, including sexual misconduct. (See the following graphic for the types of misconduct that can be reported through OEO). That link routes directly to the OEO portal to “file a report.”

In contrast, the Center for Student Wellness directs students to engage in a “culture of wellness” and includes the following graphic for resources:

Ultimately, this language difference is likely because of the different roles each of these entities play within the institution. However, as described above, students find the term sexual misconduct vague and confusing since they are unsure if what they are experiencing qualifies as sexual misconduct. Students tended to use the terms sexual violence or sexual assault when referring to behaviors they had experienced or witnessed. Further, students tend to focus on the specific behaviors they experienced, rather than terminology overall.

Students tend to focus on the specific behaviors they experienced, rather than terminology overall.

Despite recent efforts at the University of Utah to increase awareness around campus safety, IPV/DSV is rarely mentioned in messaging aimed to protect and educate students. Digital control/stalking, financial abuse, verbal abuse, emotional manipulation, and sexual coercion—all behaviors exhibited in relationship abuse—are often elided for a focus on “stranger danger” or self-defense tactics. An example of this is the SafeRide signs around campus or the focus on increased lighting at night. As described above, those efforts on physical safety seem to be top of mind for students thinking about campus safety yet not at all connected to behaviors associated with dating violence.



Top image is a screenshot of University Safety website on how to report. Lower image is a screenshot of Center for Student Wellness website.

IMPLICATIONS

Students and university personnel use different language to describe the problem of IPV/DSV. Unsurprisingly, the terminology that university administrators (including educators, researchers, and policymakers) use heavily focuses on the legal aspects of addressing IPV/DSV after it happens. Students frequently describe behaviors associated with harm, rather than overarching terminology associated with IPV/DSV.

Students and university personnel use different language to describe the problem of IPV/DSV.

With the exception of the Center for Student Wellness's educational programs focused on helping students understand healthy relationships, most resources and education heavily focus on sexual misconduct, which is a term students found vague and minimizing. The mismatch in students and administrators' use of these terms may cause confusion for students who might be seeking help or resources for IPV/DSV. Students do not use or relate to the term sexual misconduct and are unlikely to self-identify as experiencing sexual misconduct when in an abusive relationship. Ultimately, although likely dictated by legal requirements, the terms used by the Office of the Dean of Students and dictated by the reporting structures of OEO/Title IX are somewhat meaningless for students.

Further, many of the policies in place aim to address discrimination and harassment broadly, making it difficult to find information specifically about IPV/DSV in policy. Given how over-regulated the issue of sexual misconduct is on university campuses, policies have become overwhelming and confusing. In our analysis, we noted numerous missing or broken links on websites, which would likely send a message to students that the institution does not effectively

address sexual misconduct because there are too many disconnected policies in place. Unfortunately, most institutions of higher education can do little to address the complicated policy issues impacting our campuses. Currently, addressing sexual misconduct is regulated by far too many laws and policies for any one person to understand, especially students. The ever-changing Title IX regulations, the Clery Act, and the Violence Against Women Act, not to mention unique university and state policies (at least at public institutions), all dictate how colleges and universities must respond to IPV/DSV. Policy efforts to address the problem of IPV/DSV among college students have created more confusion, not less, resulting in few people understanding how to address violence after it happens.

Unfortunately, many students described dating violence as a form of "miscommunication" or other similar minimizing words, like "micromanaging," rather than abuse or control. This minimization of behaviors contributes to the challenges associated with addressing dating violence among college students. Some students in this study expressed that they would prefer educators use terms like domestic violence or rape because the words more accurately described the harm associated with behaviors. However, other students indicated that they would not think their experiences fell into those categories because they were not significant enough, so they urged us to use language about specific behaviors, rather than terms. Despite understanding the seriousness of terms in academic and legal parlance, students were unlikely to self-identify behaviors of IPV/DSV with terms like domestic violence, indicating a fundamental disconnect.

The mismatch in students and administrators' use of these terms may cause confusion for students who might be seeking help.

The terms used by the Office of the Dean of Students and dictated by the reporting structures of OEO/Title IX are somewhat meaningless for students.

In the past two years, the U has significantly increased efforts related to “campus safety,” largely in response to stakeholders demanding accountability and transparency in the aftermath of the murder of Lauren McCluskey. Although these efforts are laudable, students do not connect campus safety with IPV/DSV, and they generally do not see campus safety as a resource for managing private, intimate difficulties. Likely as a result of the ways the larger culture has socialized all of us to consider “safety” our ability to mitigate harm from strangers, students’ perceptions of campus safety and IPV/DSV are not connected.

Unfortunately, most “campus safety” efforts focus on generic crime and violence (Englander et al., 2016; Franklin et al., 2016), which often translates to “stranger danger” strategies. For example, one of the strategies discussed by students and implemented by the U is an escort service, meaning that students can request an escort to go with them between classes or after classes to their car or other transportation, especially after dark.

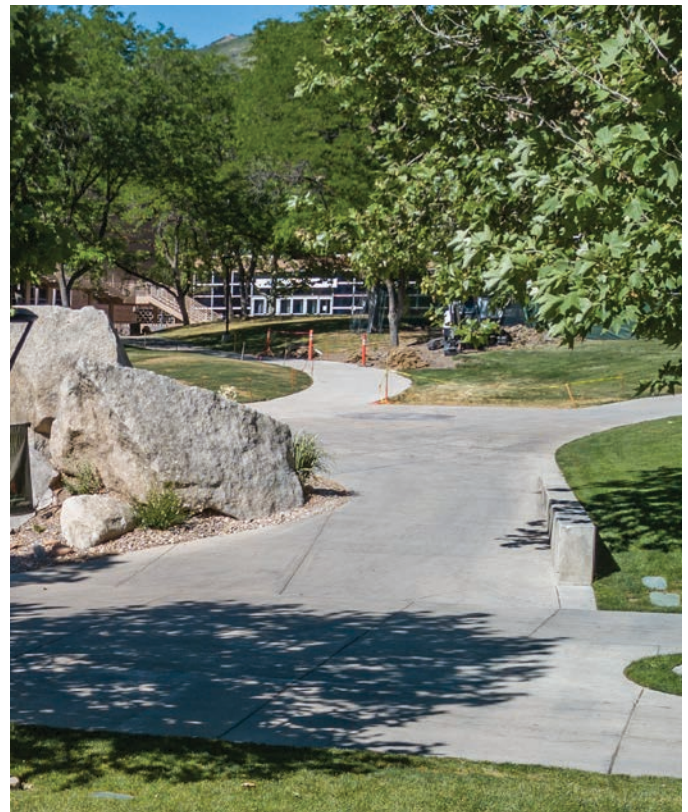
Policy efforts to address the problem of IPV/DSV among college students have created more confusion, not less.

While this may, in fact, make some students feel safer on campus, the reality is that the vast, vast majority of violence happens between two people who know each other, not strangers. While we would certainly never advocate against escort services or increased lighting, we also worry about the implications of creating a false

sense of security for students. The reality is that no additional increased lighting could have saved the lives of Lauren, MacKenzie, or Sarah. And while yes, had Lauren had an escort to her car at that particular moment, the man who murdered her may not have done so right then, it is highly likely he would have found another time and place to carry out his behavior.

Perpetrators who harm their partners in casual or romantic relationships will not be stopped by additional lighting on campus. By implying that it would have saved the lives of these women, activists and administrators may unintentionally contribute to myths around safety on campus, including placing responsibility on victims for preventing harm.

Students do not connect campus safety with IPV/DSV.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our conversations with students and analysis of university documentation, we propose several recommendations for consideration:

- **Describe specific behaviors** when discussing issues related to IPV/DSV. Students often do not resonate with terminology that feels too academic, legal, or clinical to fit their experiences. Use examples of controlling, manipulative, and technology-related behaviors that may contribute to unsafe or unhealthy situations in both educational programs and resources.
- **Establish connections between behaviors and campus resources.** Given that students do not connect IPV/DSV and “campus safety;” ensure there are resources outside of the SafeU website for IPV/DSV and that students understand how their experiences may relate to those resources.
- **Enhance resources for education** about IPV/DSV that go beyond generic, “stranger danger” tips. Consider education for people perpetrating the harm as much as for people who may experience the harm. Frame the discussion related to harmful, rather than illegal, behaviors to reach potential perpetrators.
- **Fix broken links** in policy documents and websites. Make them easier for students to navigate.
- **Educate campus community members accurately** about “danger,” especially as it relates to IPV/DSV. Specifically, the vast majority of IPV/DSV that happens among college students happens between two people who know each other, but most alerts only go out after stranger danger, which perpetuates the notion that students should only be afraid of strangers, and specifically at night. Consider including accurate statistics about IPV/DSV in campus crime alerts (which are required by federal law), and continually educating students about the significance of acquaintance-related violence
- **Advocate for changes** in/repealing the Clery Act, which has evolved in such a way as to perpetuate myths about IPV/DSV and stranger danger. Further, advocate for either no policy or a specific policy for adjudicating sexual misconduct on campuses. Title IX, a gender equity law, has contributed to significant confusion for students, faculty, and staff alike because it was never intended to address IPV/DSV.



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