SEXUAL VIOLENCE ON CAMPUS

2ND EDITION

Power-Conscious Approaches to Awareness, Prevention, and Response

Chris Linder

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SEXUAL VIOLENCE ON CAMPUS

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SEXUAL VIOLENCE ON CAMPUS

Power-Conscious Approaches to Awareness, Prevention, and Response (2nd Edition)

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Chris Linder is Professor of Higher Education in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy and Director of the McCluskey Center for Violence Prevention at the University of Utah. Chris's scholarship focuses on equity and power in higher education, with a specific focus on sexual violence. Working over a decade as a student affairs practitioner, Chris strives to make her scholarship applicable and accessible to practitioners. She leads research teams that include student affairs practitioners, students, and researchers to ensure that research is relevant and that the implications and recommendations of her research are applicable in higher education settings.

Previously, Chris's scholarship focused on student activism, the developmental processes of anti-racist white women, and the experiences of students of color in student affairs and higher education graduate programs. She has published work in the *Journal of College Student Development*, the *Review of Higher Education*, the *Journal of Higher Education*, and the *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*. She currently serves as Editor for the *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*. Chris served on the Board of Directors for the ACPA: College Student Educators International and the Association for the Study of Higher Education.

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FOREWORD

I have the kind of job that others tell me, "I could never do that," then quickly change the subject. I often wonder which part seems the most difficult: Is it hearing years' worth of survivors recounting experiences with sexual harm and violence? Is it the parents of the accused who assume I'm out for their child because I simply believed the survivor was telling me their truth? I wonder if it's because of the worry that I am perceived as siding with the accused because I ask, "how can I support you?" Could they "never do" my job because the crisis of sexual violence is too big of a problem and too overwhelming to address? As a Title IX Coordinator engaged in campus sexual violence response and prevention for more than 10 years, I can tell you that all the above and more make my work feel insurmountable. This book is not going to give us the magic answer, and if you're engaged in violence response and prevention, you know the work is far too complicated for such expectations. Instead, Chris Linder implores us to reconsider (or for some, to begin to consider) the relationship *we* – and students impacted by sexual violence – have with power.

In 2017, I picked up a copy of a book Linder coedited, *Intersections of Identity and Sexual Violence on Campus* (2017), and began attending her speaking events or webinars when I could. As a self-proclaimed social justice educator and

fellow queer, white, cisgender woman, I admired and felt challenged by the ways Linder called me into accountability as a Title IX administrator on college campuses. Moreover, Linder has consistently called attention to how BIPOC and disabled students experience sexual violence on campus and are often disproportionately accused. All too often, the regulatory world is preoccupied with only monitoring regulations while considering the historical, political, and current social relationships with power as Title IX administrators is seen as a luxury rather than a requirement. By 2018, when the first edition of *Sexual Violence on Campus* was released and I was in the first year of my PhD program, I'd familiarized myself with Linder's research and had begun to develop my own sense that higher education needed to attend to the impact of sexual violence adjudication processes on both complainants and respondents. All-or-nothing policy adjudication not only ignores historical contexts of sexual violence but leaves little, if no, room for administrators to provide resolution processes that meet community needs and educate respondents.

The second edition of Linder's, *Sexual Violence on Campus* comes on the heels of the 2024 Title IX Final Rule which provides that educational institutions can more broadly consider alternative resolution processes among other changes. Chapter 2 of the second edition is new and gives way for coordinators, advocates, and conduct officers to further name the power raging through acts of sexual violence, in our institutions, and even within ourselves. Linder's work has captivated me for many years not only for its resonance, but also as she has challenged me to recognize my relationship to power and grapple with the role we've played in reproducing the carceral state. My first "grappling" with my role in the carceral state was in 2014, as the Director of Student Conduct, when I issued an expulsion letter to a first-year student found responsible for sexual assault. He was Black, an athlete, and

the first in his family to go to college. The complainant was traumatized by what happened. The respondent left the institution unable to understand, grow, and repair, but not unwilling. I cried white lady tears on my drive home that day and almost quit my job. This student changed the way I understood my role and continues to challenge me to interrogate how power works in higher education and my complicity in its workings. Linder's work invites us to consider our roles long before I did however. This book is a tool for administrators to interrogate their relationships to power through policy adjudication before we're given the authority to enforce them. In fact, I cannot imagine doing the work as a Title IX Coordinator without committing to a lifetime of re-examining the role I play in reproductions of institutional violence. Engaging in Linder's work and recommendations for change play a significant role in my self-examination.

Because the "power-conscious framework calls attention to the role of power in the individual, institutional, and cultural levels of interactions, policies, and practices, [it necessitates] that the symptoms *and* causes of oppression be addressed. (Linder, 2018, p.14)" Linder makes the case that we must realize our roles beyond compliance and grapple with our relationships to power within our institutions. More specifically, she advocates for a community-based approach that is willing to directly name harm-doing, not just identify who gets hurt. In the spring of 2022, I took this advice to heart and inspired by the first edition of *Sexual Violence on Campus* (2018), received a small grant to host a group of students over a 5-week period to read and engage in dialogue around the book. At the time, I was a Title IX Investigator at a large public institution. Prevention was not formally part of my job description, but because I believe strongly in the role I must play to advocate for change, I hosted this dialogue group. The small group of students and three administrators met weekly.

The experience affirmed my assumption, and Linder's urging, that policies will not change or shift power: our communities together will. Each of the students ended the experience by telling me they wish they'd been able to engage in the work sooner and that all students would benefit from open, transparent, dialogue about power and sexual violence.

Recently, a colleague told me they were struggling with how to not take survivors' and respondents' critiques of the institutions personally. They felt deeply responsible for the betrayal these students felt. In my response, I thought of Linder's work and having recently read this second edition, I responded by saying that we take it personally because we want students to have positive interactions with us as representatives or agents of the systems. However, those systems and our policies don't take power and oppression into consideration. We can't let our desire to be seen as "nice" or "helpful" be the gauge for success and we (Title IX administrators) have set a low bar for ourselves regarding our definitions of "success." I told the colleague that while I believe complainants and respondents are disenfranchised by our systems and policies, that does not mean we get to absolve ourselves of the need to question, push, and ask "can we do this a better way?" Our policies will not save our students any more than they will save us. However, policy development and adjudication without a power-conscious lens and action will cause further harm to students and burn through us. Part of our work must be to recognize our own relationships to power, trauma, and harm and create pathways as campus leaders for our students and communities to do the same. Linder's work provides suggestions for how to do this.

In the second edition of the book, Linder shares her reflections on an abolitionist approach to sexual violence response. She says, "Abolitionist writers and thinkers [...] taught me we must engage in risk-taking and making mistakes

in order to eradicate violence" (p. 37). In other words, how can we create campus communities that resist the binaries of responsible or not responsible, and consider harm and trauma that happened, *AND* how we can heal together? As the second edition of this book comes at the time we are asked to revise and reconsider our policies and re-imagine practices in Title IX, we have an opportunity to respond to the community rather than treating incidents of sexual violence as one-time occurrences.

Megan Karbley, PhD (she, her, hers)

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PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION

I am a secondary survivor of interpersonal violence. I grew up in a home where men in my life were emotionally, mentally, and physically abusive to my mother and to my younger brother. However, I didn't realize this until well into my twenties. I was in my first job after my master's degree and began volunteering at the local domestic violence shelter. I went to my first training with a van full of other volunteers and remember crying most of the way back from the training because I realized how prevalent interpersonal violence was, so prevalent that I had not even identified it as part of my experience. It was just normalized. If it was normalized for me, how many others were impacted in this way?

Although I was already working in higher education, I was not knowingly or intentionally working with survivors of violence. This quickly changed. I began working with our organization to address sexual violence in fraternities and sororities and started spending more time at the women's center on campus. The director of the women's center saw something in me and mentored me, teaching me about dynamics of power and privilege. She taught me how to work against systems of domination while working in the system. She illustrated how to create a space where people can be their full, authentic selves. The women's center was a place for students on campus who did not feel at home in most other

spaces on this traditional, Midwestern campus. The campus was dominated by fraternity and sorority and sports cultures, cultures rooted in white supremacy and patriarchy; the women's center was a place where queer, feminist students of color could build community and live fully.

Eventually, I left this institution to work in a women's center in another state, where I spent the bulk of my student affairs career. I directed a center that managed a 24-hour-crisis hotline for survivors of sexual assault; provided educational programs for faculty, staff, and students; and developed a variety of programs to address inequity in higher education. Throughout my time in this center, I grew in my understanding of power and privilege, specifically related to the intersections of race and gender. I pursued a PhD and wrote my dissertation about the developmental processes of undergraduate white feminist women striving to engage in racial justice. I further developed my own, more nuanced racial consciousness and feminist, queer identity. Building on what I learned from my experience in the Midwest, I listened to and learned from students and colleagues of color and worked to create a space where people could come and be their full, authentic selves. Our center also became a space for many students who did not feel comfortable in other spaces on campus and provided an opportunity for them to build community with each other.

In addition to serving as a space for queer, feminist student of color to gather and build community, our center was also the primary support program for survivors of sexual violence on campus. We provided advocacy and support for survivors as they navigated the aftermath of sexual violence, including reporting to campus or criminal punishment systems if they so chose. We also educated faculty and staff on campus about how to appropriately support survivors of sexual violence. Our center was the hub on campus for interpersonal violence

and we were frequently pulled in numerous directions to support and advocate for survivors of interpersonal violence throughout campus.

As a staff member and director in a campus-based victim advocacy center, I felt the urgency of the problem of addressing sexual violence on college campuses. I heard stories on a daily basis of people experiencing violence, and I often felt overwhelmed and hopeless. I felt as though I was just spinning my wheels, constantly responding to crises, rather than figuring out ways to stop violence before it started. As with most centers, we were understaffed and overworked, and because we were ultimately a crisis center situated in the identity-based cluster (e.g., multicultural centers, LGBT center, and disability services) of a division of student affairs, we had little support in terms of supervision related to crisis and violence. I struggled to figure out the balance of confidentially supporting survivors while also engaging in strategies to address interpersonal violence and to support other centers in their work toward equity.

Eventually, I saw that I was dealing with my own secondary and vicarious trauma and realized it was time for me to move on from crisis work. I left my position at the women's center and became a full-time faculty member in a higher education program. For the first few years of my faculty career, I did not engage in work related to sexual violence. I needed time to heal from my experience in crisis-related work. Of course, I kept an eye on what was happening related to campus sexual violence, and in Fall 2013, I noticed that the momentum related to addressing campus sexual violence was shifting dramatically. I was pulled back into sexual violence work, this time as a researcher. After taking some time to heal, I was ready to re-engage. In the Spring of 2014, I assembled a research team to examine the strategies of sexual violence activists. We wanted to know what was causing the shift in

momentum around the issue of campus sexual violence. Engaging in this research also led me to examine the role of power and privilege in sexual violence work, specifically as they relate to race and racism. We sent a call for participants to our national networks in the United States, including several national grassroots organizations that had been organizing college students over the previous several months. No Black or Indigenous activists chose to participate in our study, despite our efforts to intentionally contact some activists we knew identified as Black or Indigenous. Upon further reflection and additional research about campus activism, I learned that many people of color do not consider themselves "activists," rather they see their work as a responsibility or obligation to their communities. Further, some people in racially minoritized groups see their work as essential to their survival, not a choice or an activity in which they engage.

During this time, I also had a realization about my role as a former campus-based advocate turned faculty. After taking some time to heal from my own vicarious trauma, it was time for me to get back to work – this time in a new way. Faculty has unique power on campuses: we can say things that practitioners cannot say for fear of losing their jobs or experiencing significant consequences. We can challenge notions of tradition and usually are not caught up in the day-to-day crisis work in which many prevention and response professionals find themselves. We can name that reactive policy is actually distracting us from the larger work of eradicating sexual violence on college campuses. Writing this book is one strategy in which I am engaging to attempt to contribute to the eradication of sexual violence on college campuses. Using my unique position as a former campus-based sexual violence

advocate and a current researcher dedicated to examining power and oppression in campus environments, I strive to interrupt and name power dynamics in sexual violence prevention and response and provide strategies for addressing sexual violence from a power-conscious perspective.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although I have spent a lot of time and energy in my professional career and personal life thinking about ways to more effectively address sexual violence, the ideas I share in this book are in no way exclusively mine. My thoughts about sexual violence and more effectively addressing it have developed over time through trial and error in my own practice, conversations with critically minded friends and colleagues who share my passion for eradicating violence, and by reading and attending conferences with many brilliant minds. I do my best to appropriately cite information as I know it, and I am sure that I have missed some important work here. Information about campus sexual violence is coming in a record number of ways (e.g., blogs, videos, reports, published journal articles and books) and exponentially faster than at any other point in our history. For these reasons, and because of my own limited perspective, I am confident that I have missed some very important resources and contributions to the work of eradicating sexual violence on college campuses. Even still, I share my thoughts with you as a contribution to the on-going important work and hope that it reaches some people at the right time and the right place in their lives to make a difference.

As I engage in the work of coming to better understand power, privilege, and oppression, I acknowledge the labor

(often unpaid) that women of color, trans folks, and people with additional minoritized identities do to educate me – a queer white cis woman – about oppression. A considerable amount of my learning about oppression related to racism, genderism and ableism, among other systems of domination comes from "nonacademic" (e.g., not published in journal articles and featured at academic conferences) spaces, including blogs and online media. I cite many of these works throughout this book because I want other people who work in traditionally academic spaces to examine these perspectives, rooted in people's lived experiences, as legitimate forms of knowledge. As illustrated throughout this text, we (those of us who work on college campuses) would make a lot more progress eradicating the work of sexual violence if we listened to more than just each other. Abolitionist thinkers and writers – in particular Mariame Kaba, Andrea Ritchie, Adrienne Marie Brown, Ruha Benjamin, Danielle Sered, and Susan Raffo – have deeply informed my growth and thinking over the past few years.

I am also grateful for the time, energy, and expertise of close colleagues and friends who have contributed to my thinking about ending violence. I am deeply grateful for the wisdom and compassion of Drs Niah Grimes and Nadeeka Karunaratne who have been my thought partners, coauthors, mirrors, editors, and confidants for the past year. We have done our best to practice abolition by creating the communities we want to live in and loving on each other through the good and the bad. Additionally, Dr Meg Evans, Whitney Hills, Jilly Mcbane, and April Pavelka read and provided feedback on chapters in this book, and I am grateful for their wisdom and expertise.

I am also grateful to the current and former student and core staff members at the MCVP who have pushed my thinking in many ways and made me a better leader. They try

their best to keep me up to date on the latest lingo and technology and help me see the world more clearly. The staff have listened to my musings and reflected back to me what made sense and what didn't. They do their best to interpret my wacky ideas, make them better, and most importantly, JUST TRY. I have learned so much over the past five years leading this Center, and it is because of the courage of the people who work here to "just try" and see what happens. Failure is part of the process, and we've embraced that. We've had some failures, and we've had far more successes. We embrace the mess and do our best to create a community of love, joy, and resistance. We speak up when we experience harm, and we take responsibility when we cause harm. It has been a beautiful space, and I am grateful to the people who have made it what it is.

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INTRODUCTION

Writing the second edition of this book is illuminating in a number of ways – and indicative of our ability and need to continually evolve. As I reread these chapters to think about ways that things have changed since the first edition of the book, I note that the most significant change happened in me, not the context in which we work. As much as the world, and more specifically my context in the United States has changed in the past six years, it has also stayed largely stagnant around addressing issues of sexual violence among college students. We are surviving a global pandemic and have had some major (and temporary) reckonings around racism and police violence. College students appear to have more awareness related to mental health, disability, and gender identity. Students do not shy away from identifying as disabled, and in fact, some refer to it as a badge of honor (Stanek & Mattson, 2024). More college students come to campuses identifying as genderqueer, interrupting traditional notions of gender identity (Beemyn, 2022). They are proficient on social media, using it to both raise awareness with each other about common social problems and identity, as well as to educate themselves on meal prepping and finances (Hosie, 2020). This generation of students pushes educators and administrators to be more cognizant of caring for students' whole beings and expects us to take care of ourselves as well. More students

push back on traditional notions of "work" and "success" than ever have before (Hall, 2024).

At the same time, the United States is incredibly divided. People have the least faith they have ever had in higher education (Brenan, 2023). People – college students included – tend to be more divided on social issues than ever before (Dimok & Wike, 2020), resulting in campuses being challenging places to engage in dialogue focused on learning and development. As more students become aware of issues related to power, privilege, oppression, and identity, they have less patience for their peers who are not on board with their perceptions and arguments. At the same time, students (and parents and politicians) who feel threatened by discussions related to power and identity push back through legislation prohibiting attention to issues of "equity, diversity, and inclusion" on college campuses (Flannery, 2024). This divided world makes discussions related to power very difficult. Many of us have internalized messages that we need to dig our heels in, advocate staunchly for our "right" position without pausing to consider others' perspectives and experiences and where our perspectives might overlap. Others of us have internalized the message that we need to be careful, resulting in us not pursuing conversations with a variety of perspectives.

In terms of my own development over the past six years, I have spent a considerable amount of time digging into and understanding abolitionist organizing principles. I have sought to better understand carcerality, carceral feminism, and my investment in these practices. I have founded and direct a Center focused explicitly on the primary prevention of dating and sexual violence among college students. I have hired and supervised staff, interns, and researchers, attempting to build collaborative community wherever possible.

I have also struggled with the tensions inherent in community building around an issue that impacts so many of us and that people have dramatically different philosophies for engaging. I hold strongly to the belief that sexual violence prevention and response should be separated for reasons I describe in this book. I further believe that all forms of oppression are connected, as also illustrated throughout this book. I know that there is overlap between the ways that people in larger communities experience sexual violence and the ways that college students do. That said, I also believe that we all have limited resources and expertise. For this reason, I maintain tight boundaries around maintaining a focus on sexual violence prevention among college students. As a leader of a sexual violence prevention and education center, this means that we say no to awareness-raising events like tabling. It means that we don't partner with every community organization that focuses on sexual violence. It means we say no a lot more often than we say yes. This can be uncomfortable. As people who do work related to social justice issues, we have been taught to say yes to everything – to accept every partnership, every collaboration, and every opportunity to "get our name out there." I am not always popular, yet I believe strongly in the idea that rest is resistance (Hersey, 2022) and that we all only have so much energy to give. When we say yes to everything, it can distract and take away from the work that we have said that we contribute to the movement. If I say yes to this, it means I must say no to that. And vice versa. As someone committed to community, these boundaries can sometimes feel uncomfortable – and I know I don't always get it right. That said, I hope these boundaries allow other people to consider their own boundaries and to be clear about the contributions they make to the work. We can support each other's work without collaborating on it – in fact, we may be more supportive by saying no to collaboration and yes to

showing up. When we can't do all the things we say yes to, we end up causing frustration in the long run. "No." is a complete sentence.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

The purpose of this text is to advance a power-conscious lens to challenge student activists, administrators, educators, and policymakers to develop more nuanced approaches to sexual violence awareness, response, and prevention on college campuses. In Chapter 1, I provide an overview of the framework of the book, including a power-conscious framework and a description of the awareness–response–prevention trifecta of addressing sexual violence on college campuses. In Chapter 2, I examine perpetration and harm in the context of historical trauma, dominance, and oppression. In Chapters 3, 4, and 5, I examine the current state of awareness, response, and prevention of sexual violence on college campuses, interrogating current practices through a power-conscious lens. In Chapter 6, I conclude with strategies to more effectively develop synergy between awareness, response, and prevention strategies, identifying some potential power-conscious approaches for addressing sexual violence among college students.

1

DEVELOPING A POWER-CONSCIOUS FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING AND ADDRESSING SEXUAL VIOLENCE

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, I share the power-conscious framework as a tool for examining sexual violence among college students. The framework consists of three assumptions: power is omnipresent, power and identity are inextricably linked, and history matters. The framework includes six action-oriented tenets: (a) engage in critical consciousness and self-awareness; (b) consider history and context when examining issues of oppression; (c) change behaviors based on reflection and awareness; (d) name and interrogate the role of power in individual and systemic practices; (e) divest from privilege; and (f) work in solidarity to address oppression. I also share definitions of words used frequently throughout the book.

Keywords: Power-conscious; sexual violence; college campus; prevention; awareness; response

The term *power* is frequently associated with sexual violence prevention and response, yet rarely defined or examined. In fact, power is a ubiquitous term that means different things to different people. Power can be used for good, bad, or some murky combination of the two. Generally, for the purposes of this book, I use the word power to refer to the ability to control or significantly influence other people's lives. Power frequently comes in two forms: formal and informal.

Formal power includes positional roles that influence other people's lives. For example, in many cases, supervisors and managers have control over employees' work schedules, salaries, and work environments. Similarly, legislators and other policymakers influence people's lives by developing and implementing educational, health, and economic policies. Finally, police, judges, and prosecuting and defending attorneys have power in criminal punishment systems. These individuals have significant discretion to influence people's lives and well-being related to law and law enforcement.

Closely related to formal power, informal power also influences people's day-to-day lives. Informal power refers to the ability to influence or control something without a formal title or role. Some people have informal power over others based on social identities and systems of oppression (Johnson, 2006; Tatum, 2000). Social identities include the identities given meaning through social constructions assigned to those identities, including race, gender, sexual orientation, and ability among others. Systems of oppression include things like racism, sexism, homophobia, genderism and transphobia, classism, and ableism, among others. These systems give members of dominant groups (e.g., white, middle- and upper-class, nondisabled, and cisgender people) access to

resources based on social norms and expectations (Johnson, 2006; Tatum, 2000). For example, because cisgender people are considered the norm in relationship to gender identity, policymakers set up policies and practices that center cisgender people's comfort, including so-called bathroom bills that prohibit transgender people from using restrooms aligning with their gender identity. Transgender people, on the other hand, experience higher rates of violence in public spaces, including restrooms, schools, and workplaces because they do not always fit societal definitions of the norm (Bagagli et al., 2021). Similarly, white people frequently have access to greater forms of power than people of color with similarly situated identities. What I mean by this is that white middle-class men typically have greater access to power than middle-class men of color. This informal power results in access to institutions and resources, assumptions of "goodness," and ultimately greater access to safety and security.

How does power relate to sexual violence? Examining histories of sexual violence in western countries points to a number of ways that power is the root of sexual violence. Specifically, when Europeans colonized Indigenous lands in what is today considered North and South America, they used rape as a tool of power and control (Deer, 2015). Colonizers raped Indigenous people as a way to reward themselves for conquering villages and to keep Indigenous people living in fear so that white colonizers could better control them (Deer, 2015; Freedman, 2013).

Similarly, slavers used rape as a tool of power and control over enslaved people. Because the children of enslaved women became the property of the slave-owner, slavers frequently raped enslaved women as a way to increase their labor supply and economic power (Freedman, 2013). These two examples illuminate some of the roots of the relationship between power and sexual violence – roots that continue to grow deeper over

time. In the US postemancipation, white men, especially those with formal and institutional power like police, used rape as a tool to keep formerly enslaved people "in their place" (McGuire, 2010). By raping Black and Indigenous people with impunity, white men demonstrated their power to control other people's lives and create a sense of fear in minoritized communities (McGuire, 2010; Thompson-Miller & Picca, 2017). White, owning-class men used rape as a tool of domination by falsely accusing Black men of raping or attempting to rape white women. In the period postemancipation, white men mobbed and lynched Black people at alarmingly high rates, often in relationship to false accusations of rape (Giddings, 1984; McGuire, 2010).

Patterns of domination and control continue today. People who cause sexual harm target women of color, gay and bisexual people, transgender people, and people with disabilities at higher rates than their white, straight, cisgender, and nondisabled peers (Cantor et al., 2019; Coulter et al., 2017), likely because minoritized people's very existence threatens the comfort and perceived safety and security of dominant group people. Members of dominant groups have an investment in the status quo because they benefit from the ways systems are currently structured, including the ability to cause harm to people without fear of repercussion.

LANGUAGE CONSIDERATIONS

The language of sexual violence is complicated and nuanced and varies depending on context. For the purposes of this text, I define *sexual violence* as any act of nonconsensual physical sexual assault or rape, including nonconsensual touching. Although some scholars use the phrase sexual violence to

encompass sexual harassment (including verbal harassment and hostile environments), I am concerned about conflating physical and nonphysical sexual harm. Although acts of nonphysical sexual violence certainly lead to physical sexual violence, and the consequences of nonphysical sexual violence are significant, my concern about conflating the two relates to numbers. The reality is that almost every person who identifies as a woman or nonbinary person has experienced verbal sexual harassment at some point in their lives, in some cases, almost daily (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2019; UCSD Center, 2019). By conflating sexual harassment and sexual assault, I worry that scholars and activists dilute the significance of physical sexual assault and contribute to the narrative that women and nonbinary people are over-exaggerating their experiences because we are not using accurate language to describe those experiences.

Although I use the term sexual violence to refer to physical sexual assault, I realize that not all research does the same; therefore, as I refer to other people's work and scholarship on sexual violence and assault, I will do my best to clarify what definitions other scholars use. For example, scholars use the terms *unwanted sexual touching*, *sexual coercion*, *incapacitated rape*, *forcible rape,* and *sexual assault* to examine and discuss prevalence of sexual violence. Each of these terms has specific definitions that may or may not be the same across the research. To minimize confusion among people taking surveys about sexual violence, many researchers ask about specific behaviors, rather than specific terminology, then categorize the behaviors into various terms (deHeer & Jones, 2017; Wood et al., 2017).

Additionally, because of the heavy emphasis on compliance with policy mandates as explored in Chapter 4, many discussions on sexual violence focus on illegal behavior rather than harmful behavior. As Levine and Meiners (2020) note,

"'Crime' is a legal category and a volatile, malleable political term. 'Harm', on the other hand, is a relationship and experience[...]'harm' allows people to name and describe what happened to them" (p. 7). For these reasons, throughout the book, I focus on harmful behavior rather than just illegal behavior.

Scholarship about sexual violence frequently centers gender in its analysis; however, most scholars use binary language when examining gender and frequently focus on *men* or *women* in their scholarship (Linder et al., 2020). Although scholarship about sexual violence must examine constructs of gender as they relate to sexism, patriarchy, cissexism and other systems of oppression, scholars must also work to intentionally include expansive notions of gender in their work. For example, throughout this book, when I refer to *women* or *men*, I am referring to all people who identify as *women* or *men*. A gender expansive definition of *women* or *men* refers to people who align their identity in some way with the constructs of women or men and includes cisgender and transgender people. Additionally, some people do not identify with the constructs of men or women, and instead, identify as a nonbinary gender or with no gender at all (i.e., agender). People who identify with a nonbinary gender may use terms like *gender nonbinary*, *genderqueer*, *gender nonconforming*, and/or *transgender* to describe themselves. Throughout this book, I will use the term *gender nonbinary* to refer to people who do not identify with the constructs of the binary of woman or man. I do not use the phrase *men and women* in my work. The phrase is simply inaccurate – it excludes people who identify as nonbinary or genderqueer. Instead, I simply use the word *people*. If I am specifically referring to cisgender or transgender men or women, I will explicitly name that.

Additionally, I use the term *minoritized* to refer to populations of people who have experienced harm as a result of systems of oppression and domination. While some scholars have historically used the term *minority* to refer to populations of people who experience oppression and marginalization, I find the term *minority* inaccurate because it refers to a numerical representation of people when that is not always the same as experiencing systematic oppression. For example, in the US, women make up more than half of undergraduate students on campus (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.), so they are not in the numerical minority; however, given the culture on college campuses, they still experience significant harm as a result of sexism, which is an example of a system of oppression.

The term *system of oppression* refers to the systematic ways people experience harm and violence as a result of power, privilege, and domination (Collins, 2000; Johnson, 2006; Tatum, 2000). Examples of systems of oppression include racism, sexism, homophobia, and ableism. Referring to systems of oppression rather than the minoritized group puts the onus on the problem – oppression – rather than the people experiencing the problem. For example, scholars consistently examine the experiences of people of color in education, calling attention to ways students of color experience higher education differently (often more negatively) than their white peers, yet fail to name racism as the cause of these negative experiences. Failing to name the system of oppression as the problem contributes to a deficit perspective on people of color in education, highlighting the ways in which they do not "succeed" in the same ways as their white peers (Harper, 2012; Patton, 2016).

Taking the problem of identifying and naming actors responsible for sexual violence one step further, I also use active voice as frequently as possible in this text. Active voice

puts responsibility on people for perpetuating oppression and harm (Lawrence et al., 2019). When discussing sexual violence, scholars and journalists frequently make people who cause harm invisible. For example, phrases like "women of color are assaulted at high rates" removes any actor from the discussion. Who is responsible for the action of sexual assault? Using phrases like "people who cause harm target women of color at high rates" puts the onus on the people who cause harm and subtly calls attention to addressing the problem of sexual violence by emphasizing the role of people who cause harm *and* naming the harm caused to victims.

In the first edition of this book, I referred to perpetrators throughout the text. Since writing the first edition, I have shifted my way of thinking away from using the phrase perpetrator to *people who cause harm*. Sometimes, I use the term *people who cause sexual harm*, *or people who have or may cause harm* or *people who have engaged in sexual violence*. All of these terms describe the behavior a person engages in rather than describing the person as the problem. As described in the introduction, I have become more in tune with abolitionist thinking as a way to eradicate sexual violence, and abolitionist thinking requires us to recognize that no human is disposable (Kaba & Ritchie, 2022). Instead of referring to a person by the most harmful behavior they have engaged in, we can begin to see people who cause harm as human beings with the capacity to change when we focus on the behavior, rather than labeling the person as the problem (Willis, 2018). Although I do not use the term perpetrator in this text, I do sometimes use the term *perpetration* to describe the set of behaviors associated with causing sexual harm. To me, there is a difference between referring to a person as a perpetrator and referring to the behaviors associated with perpetration.