

Attitudes, Beliefs, and Perceptions of Intimate Partner Abuse in a College Sample:

Results of a Pilot Study

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## Abstract

This study examined Ohio State students' thoughts and feelings regarding the issue of intimate partner abuse (IPA). Items specifically assessed beliefs about which behaviors constitute abuse, agreement with myths and recognition of facts about IPA, perceptions of the frequency and severity of abuse among OSU couples, prior and current experiences as a victim of IPA, and willingness to intervene in a violent scenario or associated reasons for not taking action. Students in our sample were less likely to define items of a psychological/nonverbal nature as abuse, and victims were less likely to rate a variety of items as such. Also, the overall sample agreed more with facts than with myths about IPA, but there were important differences observed between genders and victims/non-victims on these items. Furthermore, the majority of students indicated that they would take some form of action if overhearing a violent episode, but many also said they would feel reluctant due to concerns about escalation and lack of adequate knowledge regarding how to handle such a situation. Analyses of correlations, implications for education and awareness efforts, and directions for future research are discussed.

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In recent years, the issue of abuse and violence between intimate partners has received increased attention and recognition as a social problem. As these developments have brought to light the severity and urgency of the subject, general disagreement between researchers, theorists, and activists about the specific definition and nature of intimate partner abuse (IPA) has undoubtedly elicited confusion among both professionals and the public as a whole (Kelly & Johnson, 2008). For the purposes of this study, intimate partner abuse refers to behaviors occurring within the context of an intimate, romantic relationship between two individuals for which one or both partners consciously perform actions that cause harm to the other partner.

A review of the literature on IPA indicates that abuse between intimate partners is occurring at a high rate among university students (Straus, 2004; Nabors, Dietz, & Jasinski, 2006) and young people in general. For example, the International Dating Violence Study, which examined prevalence rates at 31 universities, reported that 29% of students overall reported having physically assaulted an intimate partner in the previous year (Straus, 2004). Much of the research suggests that younger people, particularly those aged 16-24, are at the highest risk of all age groups for victimization by a dating partner (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2001). It has also been observed that younger people are more likely than older adults to agree with myths and incorrect attributions of IPA and are less likely to correctly identify abusive behaviors as such (Nabors et al., 2006). One possible explanation for these trends is that a system of attitudes and beliefs supportive of partner abuse may contribute significantly to a culture of intimate violence. Because this

issue affects so many young people, further investigation into attitudes and beliefs as well as other risk factors associated with IPA is needed.

Although research about IPA has become much more inclusive of non-married dating partners over the past 25 years, relatively few studies have extensively investigated the belief systems that may contribute to courtship violence. A two-part study by Carlson and Worden (2005) explored some of these concepts; their overall findings indicated that respondents very often identified acts of physical violence as domestic violence but were less clear about which non-physical acts constitute domestic violence. Similarly, students in other samples identified scenarios as more severe and more of a violation of the victim's rights when the type of abuse was physical compared to psychological (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Shilen-Dellinger, Huss, & Kramer, 2004; Capezza & Arriaga, 2008). Significant gender effects have also been observed, as research indicates that men exhibit more belief in myths, less identification of facts, and less identification of physical and sexual abuse behaviors (Nabors et al., 2006). Age has been shown to be an influence both on attitudes and beliefs as well as prevalence estimates. Younger respondents (under the age of 30) estimated higher rates of prevalence than older adults, which may be due to higher rates of abuse in this age group (Carlson & Worden, 2005). The second part of this study, which focused on myths and causation endorsements, found that the majority (63%) of respondents agreed with victim-blaming statements, such as the idea that most women could escape an abusive relationship "if they really wanted to" (Worden & Carlson, 2005, p. 1227). When items based on this study were administered to a college sample, participants subscribed to these myths and incorrect attributions at even higher rates for most items, such as 77%

for the aforementioned item example (Nabors et al., 2006). However, Nabors and colleagues (2006) also observed that students who were further along in their university education were better at identifying empirically-validated statements and were less likely to endorse myth items.

Investigations of prevalence rates in college samples indicate high rates of violence against dating partners (Straus, 2004; Nabors et al., 2006). Some of these research findings are surprising in that they are contrary to commonly accepted beliefs about IPA. For example, Straus (2004) found that women were more often the perpetrator, which is generally consistent with other literature (Makepeace, 1981; Straus, 1999; Archer, 2000; Moffitt, Caspi, Rutter, & Silva, 2001; Felson, 2002). However, literature points to women also being the victim of physical violence more often and sustaining higher level violence and injury (Makepeace, 1986; Archer, 2000; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Research on same-sex couple abuse rates is still developing, but existing literature suggests that rates are similar to those for heterosexuals (Island & Letellier, 1991; Lockhart, White, Causby, & Isaac, 1994). Other behaviors of interest include stalking and sexual assault. Stalking behaviors are important to investigate because of the significant link to intimate relationships and the psychological effects associated with being stalked (Douglas & Dutton, 2001). Sexual assault and rape that occurs in the context of intimate relationships is not a topic that receives much attention, but it is an issue that affects women in particular because women are most often the victims of IPA behaviors of a sexual nature in heterosexual marriages and cohabiting relationships (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

Another area that has not been widely studied is the willingness of bystanders to intervene in situations of intimate abuse. According to one study, females who chose to take action when they overheard an abusive episode were more likely to call upon system intervention (such as calling the police), whereas males who elected to intervene favored personal intervention (such as approaching the couple) (Seelau, Seelau, & Poorman, 2003). Females also reported more of a willingness to take action at all (Seelau et al., 2003). However, there is no literature to date that extensively examines links between general beliefs about abuse (other than seriousness ratings based on gender and orientation) and peer intervention tactics. In this study, we examined specific correlations between items assessing attitudes and beliefs and participants' reported intervention strategies because educational and awareness efforts directed toward changing students' thinking about IPA may be assessed by changes in reported willingness to intervene over time. Interpretation of the data from these measures will allow for a better understanding of the link between students beliefs and their actions, which is necessary information in the development of education and prevention efforts for the program for which this instrument will be used.

Based on the findings in the literature about IPA in college communities, it is clear that there is a need for primary prevention and educational strategies on the part of campus departments and services. Since The Ohio State University is consistently among the most populous universities in the United States and has a relatively diverse student body (Office of the University Registrar Official Reports, 2001-2007; Office of Institutional Research and Planning Statistical Summary, Autumn 2008), we are interested in the particular culture of partner abuse in our campus community. This

exploratory study was done in collaboration with The Ohio State University Student Wellness Center in partnership with the Columbus Coalition Against Family Violence, and was intended to assess the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of IPA at Ohio State as well as general prevalence rates of abuse among students. We developed a survey instrument and piloted it with a small sample of students in order to assess whether this measure was suitable for use in a larger random sample of OSU students. This instrument will ultimately be administered annually by staff members at the OSU Student Wellness Center with random samples of 10,000 students. Data from these studies will be used to facilitate the development of prevention and education programs based on the needs of the Ohio State community and to assess trends over time.

We included in our study items intended to measure beliefs related to myths and attributions, beliefs about what constitutes abuse, and questions about how participants would react in a hypothetical scenario in which they overhear a violent episode. Perceived prevalence and severity of abuse at Ohio State was examined as well. In one study, 79% of students reported believing that IPA is a serious problem (Knickrehm & Teske, 2000, in Nabors et al., 2006). While this high level of awareness may be indicative of effective awareness efforts, it may also be due to the relatively high rates of abuse in the college age group. Another set of items inquired about participants' personal experience as victims of IPA and used some items similar to those used in the International Dating Violence Study (Straus, 2004). This set will be important for future studies using this instrument because the department that will eventually administer this survey will want to know about vulnerable populations on campus. This information may also prove valuable in assessing links between prevalence rates and attitudes and beliefs

as well. We examined correlations between demographic variables, such as gender, and IPA items, as well as assessing students' awareness of a variety of general and IPA-specific resources both on campus and in the community. This information will be useful in determining which resources need further promotion to potential and existing victims, perpetrators, and otherwise concerned or interested students.

As was previously mentioned, this study was meant to be exploratory in nature and specifically focused on tailoring an instrument to the Ohio State student community. In addition to performing correlational analyses on variables of interest, we also performed an exploratory factor analysis of the items to observe the theoretical structure of the survey. We hypothesized that results for our dependent variables would generally reflect those found in the literature, particularly concerning rates of personal experience, gender and age differences in myth belief versus fact recognition, and poorer identification of nonphysical types of abuse, especially psychological forms. These results will help us to understand how our campus compares to other samples of young people in the U.S. and will direct us in deciding whether previously researched items may or may not be useful in assessing the same constructs at OSU.

Some of our *a priori* hypotheses involved observing previously unexplored correlations. For example, we predicted that more experience of victimization would correlate with higher ratings of definitions and higher prevalence and severity estimates; we also predicted that having been victimized would negatively correlate with agreement with myths. Our reasoning is that having personal experience with abuse will have made people more aware of and sympathetic with the issue as a whole. Lower ratings of definitions were expected to correlate with lower ratings of perceived prevalence and

severity, reasoning that the fewer behaviors one would classify as abuse, the less he or she would believe there is to report about the issue. These lower ratings of definitions might also correlate with higher agreement with myths. Finally, we were interested in exploring how attitudes and beliefs about definitions and IPA myths and facts related to students' willingness to take action or reasoning for not taking action in a violent scenario. It is reasonable to suppose that people would not intervene in a situation if they did not consider the behaviors involved to be "abusive" or if they do not believe a member of the couple was in significant danger. Therefore, we hypothesized that there would be a link between not intervening and fewer definitions of behaviors, lower estimates of prevalence and severity, and more agreement with myths.

## Methods

### *Participants*

Ninety-nine undergraduate students enrolled in sections of an introductory psychology course participated in exchange for course credit. Because this course fulfills a general education requirement, it typically includes students from a variety of disciplines. This study was one of many options available to fulfill the course requirement.

### *Materials*

This study used an online survey design. Items were presented in sections and addressed participants' classification of unhealthy relationship behaviors, endorsement of myths and empirically-based facts, estimates of prevalence, judgments of severity, reported intervention reasoning and tactics, personal experience of IPA victimization, and awareness of relevant campus and community resources (see Appendix). Attitudes and

beliefs were measured using two sets of items. One set presented the participant with a list of behaviors for which they were asked whether they believed each behavior always/never constitutes abuse, or if it depends on the situation. These behaviors varied by type (verbal, physical, sexual, emotional/manipulation/intimidation, stalking/harassment) and severity (i.e. pushing, choking). Another set of items evaluated endorsement of certain attitudes and myths about abuse between couples (paying particular attention to victim-blaming statements) and statements about causes that have been identified through empirical research. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with each statement on a five-point scale (“strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”).

Participants’ willingness to intervene was assessed with a hypothetical scenario in which they were told to imagine that they are overhearing an episode of abuse occurring next door, and that they are sure that one member of the couple is being abused by the other partner. Details of the scenario were kept to a minimum so that the scenario would register as something that the individual considers to be abusive in order to control for subjective definitions of abuse and to avoid gender/orientation biases. Participants indicated from a list of choices all the ways in which they would react to the situation. The choices included levels of personal intervention (i.e. knocking on the door) and system intervention (i.e. calling the police), in addition to choosing not to intervene at all. Similarly, those who chose not to become involved selected from a variety of reasons reflective of different attitudes or issues (i.e. belief that the victim probably deserved it, fear of being harmed, etc.).

Perceived prevalence and severity were assessed in two separate sections. Two items at the beginning of the survey asked participants to rate on a five-point scale the severity of IPA at Ohio State at this time as well as an estimate of the percentage of Ohio State students encountering IPA issues in their relationships. The second section asked students to estimate on a five-point scale the percentage of Ohio State students who they believe experience each of several types of abusive behaviors. Actual prevalence rates were determined by another set of items which directly asked if participants had ever experienced various behaviors from a dating partner. These behaviors varied by type and severity as well, and frequency was indicated on a scale. A set of items measuring awareness of specific campus and community resources were included as well. For each resource, we asked whether participants had heard of the resource, if they knew what they do, and if they had ever volunteered/worked for each resource.

Demographic information was collected at the end of the survey. Each participant indicated his or her gender, sexual orientation, month and year of birth, race/ethnicity, international or domestic student status, year in school, residence, and relationship status and experience. Finally, we asked participants whether they answered the questions as honestly and accurately as possible and provided them with the opportunity to offer feedback in an open-ended item.

### *Procedure*

The questionnaire was administered online using SurveyMonkey.com, a web-based tool for creating internet surveys. Students who signed up to participate received an e-mail with a unique link to the consent form and study description. This link contained a digital code that was only used to confirm their participation so that they could receive

course credit; each code was destroyed immediately after credit was awarded to ensure anonymity. The study description explained the types and nature of the items, clarified terminology and ensured confidentiality. This description also emphasized that we were interested in their personal opinions and beliefs and stressed the importance of responding honestly (to minimize socially desirable responses). After reading through the description, participants gave informed consent electronically by clicking on another link that took them to the survey. When the survey was complete, participants viewed a debriefing form explaining the background and purpose of the study in greater detail. They were also provided with a list of campus and community resources for victims of intimate partner abuse as well as educational resources. Completion of the survey was estimated to take about 20-30 minutes.

Since the survey was administered online, participants were able to complete the survey in the privacy of a place of their choosing. We believe this may have minimized socially desirable responses because of the increased anonymity of the internet, and therefore participants may have responded more accurately and honestly. To further control for social desirability, participants were reminded throughout the survey that everyone has different feelings about such issues and that we are interested in their personal opinions and reactions. Care was taken to ensure that the wording in each section clarified any ambiguous terminology for which we were not assessing individual perceptions, such as our use of the word “partner.” We also carefully designed sections to best avoid order effects, and the “Back” button was disabled to prevent participants from changing previous answers after encountering new items. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic and especially considering the direct questions about abuse victimization, we

anticipated that some participants may have experienced enough discomfort to exit the survey prior to completion. Therefore, the exit links on every page linked to a list of resources for IPA victims and perpetrators.

## Results

### *Demographics*

Ninety-nine undergraduates participated in this study. The sample included approximately 60% women, 38% men, and 2% transgender students (biological sex not identified). Ninety-seven percent identified themselves as heterosexual, including all of the males, with the remaining 3% evenly split between homosexual, bisexual, and uncertain/questioning females. In terms of ethnicity, participants were roughly 70% Caucasian, 11% African-American, 11% Asian/Asian-American, 5% “other” race, 1% Native American, and 1% multiracial. There were no Hispanic students in this sample. Additionally, 9% were international students. Fifty-seven percent were first-year freshmen, 25% were sophomores, 11% were juniors, and 7% were students in their fourth year or beyond. The average age was 20 with a standard deviation of 2.6 years. About 64% lived in residence halls, 26% lived off-campus, 7% lived at home with relatives, and 2% lived in sorority/fraternity housing. Finally, about 87% of the sample had any prior relationship experience, including 35% who reported current involvement with a partner, 35% who had been in a relationship within the past year but were not currently involved, 16% who had experience prior to the past year, and 2% who reported that they were unsure of their status.

*Definitions*

Almost all definitional items were significantly positively correlated (most at  $p < .01$ ) with only five exceptions: silent treatment and insults, silent treatment and kicking/choking, excessive checking (invasion of privacy) and destroying items, excessive checking and throwing an item, and pushing and threatening to expose info. As observed in Table 1, mean ratings (on a scale from 0-2 – where higher scores indicate stronger agreement) for some of the common psychological forms of abuse were lower than ratings for any of the other behaviors. The lowest definitional rating was for the item “giving a partner the silent treatment to get one’s way in the relationship,” followed by “checking a partner’s phone calls/texts/Facebook/email or excessively checking in with a partner” and “a partner showing up at places the other partner goes in order to keep track of him/her.” Threatening to expose information and the threat of outing a same-sex partner were more consistently rated as abusive behaviors and had mean ratings closer to those of the verbal and lower-level physical behaviors. “Destroying a partner’s things to intimidate him/her” was rated highly as well, though this item can be considered a combination of psychological and physical abuse. The behaviors most consistently rated as abusive included real or threatened higher-level physical violence such as kicking or choking, slapping, hitting, or punching, and threatening to use violence with or without a weapon. There were no significant differences in identification of behaviors based on the gender of the participant.

As shown in Table 2, all of the significant correlations between definitions and experiences occurred in the negative direction, meaning that experiencing more abuse was related to less likelihood that they would be defined as abusive. Experiences of harm

requiring medical or psychological care, threats of violence, sexual pressure, and all physical violence items were represented in the definitional correlations. The three items regarding experiences of verbal abuse, nonviolent psychological abuse, or harassment/stalking were nonsignificant. Additionally, definitions of excessive yelling/swearing, insults/put-downs/name-calling, stalking, threats to expose personal info, and giving the silent treatment for manipulative purposes yielded no significant relationships with abusive experiences. The strongest correlations in this set were observed between defining “kicking or choking” and experiencing kicking or choking, threats of violence, harm requiring medical care, and harm requiring psychological care/counseling.

Higher subjective judgments of severity yielded positive correlations with three definition items: threatening to expose personal info, threatening to “out” one’s partner, and pressuring a partner sexually (all  $r(98) = .22, p < .05$ ). These same three items also yielded positive correlations with higher general prevalence estimates respectively at  $r(98) = .21, r(98) = .25$ , and  $r(98) = .22$  (all  $p < .05$ ). Higher definitions of outing a partner positively correlated with higher estimates for OSU couples’ experiences of yelling and screaming,  $r(98) = .30, p < .01$ , extreme and unwarranted jealousy,  $r(98) = .24, p < .05$ , insults/put-downs/humiliation/ridicule,  $r(98) = .26, p < .01$ , and ignoring/withholding affection to get one’s way,  $r(98) = .26, p < .05$ .

### *Attitudes and Beliefs*

Overall, students rated myth-based statements lower and empirically validated statements higher on this scale, for which higher scores on a 0-4 scale indicate more agreement (see Table 3). Participants were generally good at identifying the facts that

violence is a learned behavior, that people who are physically aggressive toward family members have underlying psychological problems, and that society teaches boys to be aggressive. The lowest myth rating was for the statement “a lot of what is called ‘domestic violence’ is just a normal reaction to day-to-day stress.” The myth item with the highest agreement rating was for the victim-blaming statement that “most people could find a way to get out of an abusive relationship if they really wanted to.” The three victim-blaming statements (women provoke abuse, victims secretly want to be abused, and victims could escape abusive relationships) had the greatest standard deviations, suggesting that these items had the least consistent ratings. Although the ratings for myths were lower and ratings for facts were higher, the majority of the mean ratings were clustered more closely around 2 (“neither agree nor disagree”) than on either of the extreme ends.

We checked both types of items in this section to see how they were intercorrelated. For the empirical statements, understanding that domestic violence is a learned behavior significantly correlated with all other empirical items in the positive direction. This was also the only item for which “society teaches boys to be aggressive” was significantly related. Three myth items strongly correlated with each other: the belief that domestic violence is a normal stress reaction was correlated with the belief that some people secretly want to be abused,  $r(98) = .41, p < .01$ , and that women provoke violence  $r(98) = .50, p < .01$ . The latter two items also correlated with each other,  $r(98) = .43, p < .01$ . Our DV/stress myth item also negatively correlated with the empirical statement about DV being a learned behavior pattern, and recognition that being abusive is

indicative of psychological issues was negatively correlated with the myth that women abuse male partners infrequently, both  $r(98) = .23, p < .05$ .

One of our hypotheses was that significant gender differences would exist for beliefs about myths and facts. A t-test revealed significant differences in mean agreement ratings based on gender for six of the eleven items in this section. Two of these items included empirically-validated statements, for which females indicated more agreement. These items were “people who are violent toward family members are not likely to change”,  $t(94) = -2.60, p < .05$ , and “society teaches boys to be aggressive”,  $t(95) = -2.14, p < .05$ . The other four statements were myths, for which males reported significantly more agreement than did females. These items included the statements, “a lot of what is called ‘domestic violence’ is just a normal reaction to day-to-day stress”,  $t(95) = 2.07, p < .05$ , “frequently, violence towards women happens because the woman provokes a fight”,  $t(95) = 2.16, p < .05$ , “some people in abusive relationships secretly want to be treated that way”,  $t(95) = 2.13, p < .05$ , and “most people could find a way to get out of an abusive relationship if they really wanted to”,  $t(95) = 2.06, p < .05$ .

We also observed correlations between myth agreement and definitions, as reported in Table 4. All of the six myth items correlated significantly with at least one behavior item. Higher agreement with the statement “a lot of what is called ‘domestic violence’ is a normal reaction to day-to-day stress” showed significant negative correlations with all behavioral identification items. Identifying sexual pressure as abusive correlated with lower agreement for five myths, excluding the statement that victims could escape an abusive relationship “if they really wanted to.”

For the most part, empirically-based items were not significantly correlated with experiencing IPA. The item “society teaches boys to be aggressive” was correlated with experiencing invasions of privacy and/or stalking,  $r(97) = .21, p < .05$ , and sexual pressure,  $r(98) = .20, p < .05$ . The statement regarding abuse being a behavior that is learned at home was negatively correlated with experiencing five relatively higher-order abuse behaviors: extreme verbal abuse,  $r(97) = -.23, p < .05$ , slapping, hitting, or punching,  $r(96) = -.21, p < .05$ , kicking or choking,  $r(96) = -.25, p < .05$ , harm requiring medical care,  $r(96) = -.23, p < .05$ , and harm requiring psychological care,  $r(97) = .22, p < .05$ .

Correlations between experiencing abuse and agreement with myths were significant for some items when analyzed by gender. For men, agreement that domestic violence is a normal stress reaction was positively correlated with experience of a partner destroying personal items to intimidate,  $r(37) = .49, p < .01$ , extreme verbal abuse,  $r(37) = .39, p < .05$ , kicking or choking,  $r(37) = .35, p < .05$ , or having objects thrown at them,  $r(37) = .33, p < .05$ . Higher agreement that violence towards women happens because the woman provokes a fight was correlated with experiencing having an object thrown at them,  $r(37) = .53, p < .01$ , threats to expose personal information,  $r(37) = .52, p < .01$ , extreme verbal abuse,  $r(37) = .46, p < .01$ , sexual pressure,  $r(37) = .38, p < .05$ , and pushing/shoving/grabbing,  $r(37) = .37, p < .05$ . Experience of sexual pressure from a (presumably) female partner was also positively correlated with beliefs that some people want to be abused,  $r(37) = .34, p < .05$ , and that women abuse men infrequently,  $r(37) = .33, p < .05$ .

For women, experience of having personal items destroyed as an intimidation tactic was negatively correlated with agreement that people could get out of abusive relationships if they really wanted to,  $r(58) = -.26, p < .05$ . Higher agreement that some people secretly want to be abused was positively correlated with having items destroyed,  $r(58) = .29, p < .05$ , having objects thrown at them,  $r(58) = .30, p < .05$ , being pushed, shoved, or grabbed,  $r(58) = .33, p < .01$ , being slapped, hit, or punched,  $r(58) = .29, p < .05$ , and experiencing threats of violence,  $r(58) = .26, p < .05$ . Finally, experience of extreme verbal abuse was negatively correlated with agreement that women abuse men infrequently,  $r(58) = -.27, p < .05$ .

#### *Prevalence and Severity Estimates*

The mean estimate of general abuse prevalence for the total sample was 2.19 on a scale of 1-5, where higher scores indicate greater frequency. This closely corresponds to “few (21-40%)” students supposedly encountering issues of violence or abuse in their relationships. Males’ mean rating for this item was significantly lower than females’ mean rating,  $t(95) = -2.64, p < .01$ . For estimates of the prevalence rates of specific behaviors among OSU couples, mean ratings ranged from 1.03 for physical violence to 2.20 for yelling and screaming during arguments. The only significant gender difference in ratings for this section was for “often yelling or screaming during arguments,” which females rated as occurring more often,  $t(94) = -2.11, p < .05$ . When asked to rate how severe of an issue IPA is for OSU students at this time, the overall mean estimate was 2.31, which is partway between “mildly severe” (2) and “moderately severe” (3). Mean ratings on this item by gender were significantly different as well with females indicating more severity,  $t(95) = -2.13, p < .05$ .

Experience of abuse was significantly positively correlated with higher estimates of general prevalence for all but two experience items. Additionally, as observed in Table 5, each personal experience item was significantly correlated with higher prevalence estimates for an item of similar theme (though not always exact) in the section measuring prevalence estimates of specific behaviors. On the other hand, just over half of the experience items were significantly correlated with ratings of severity; these correlations varied by type and level of violence.

### *Reported Experience*

Participants reported experiences across six levels of frequency to allow us to distinguish infrequent or isolated incidents from behavioral patterns. Sixty percent of the sample had experienced at least one of the unhealthy relationship behaviors at some point in their lives. Table 6 reports specific figures for each item in this set. The most frequently cited behavior was checking personal items or excessively checking in, with 22% of the total sample reporting this experience in the past year. This was followed closely by sexual pressure at 21%. Every item had at least 9% of participants reporting ever having experienced each behavior, and half the items had over 20% of participants reporting any prior experience. None of the differences in mean reportings by gender was statistically significant.

### *Intervention*

For the section that asked participants to imagine overhearing a violent incident, 86% of the sample expressed willingness to take action of some kind. The two most frequently cited actions involved notifying authorities, with 63% electing to inform an RA (including 75% of those living in residence halls) and 54% choosing to call the police

(including 57% of those not living in residence halls). Though system intervention was generally favored, 46% also indicated that they would privately speak with the victim at a later time. First-year students were more likely than other age groups to get involved, with 91% of participants responding compared to roughly 80% for each other rank. The least frequently cited responses were for actions that had more direct dealings with the abuser, such as attempting to remove him or her from the situation (6%) or talking with him or her either alone (8%) or with the victim present (5%). Though slightly more females than males reported possible involvement, the difference was not great (88% versus 84% respectively) and there were only a few significant differences by type of action. Females were slightly more likely to say they would call upon an RA or the police or talk to the victim later, and they were much more likely to call a domestic violence hotline for advice (29% versus 16%). Males were much more inclined to take personal action at the time of the incident, such as banging on the wall (37% versus 19%) or knocking on the door (40% versus 17%), and were also more likely to approach the abuser later (13% versus 3%).

Due to a technical issue in the software, the survey could not be designed to present the “reasons for non-involvement” item only to the 14% of participants who indicated they would not get involved. For this reason, 67% of participants provided at least one reason for why they might not choose to take any action. The top two reported reasons involved not knowing the best course of action and fear that intervention would cause the incident to escalate (about 60% each). These were followed by lack of acquaintance with the couple (39%), fear of being harmed by the abuser (37%), and the belief that it isn’t their business to step in (33%). Very few participants were inclined to

brush off the incident by expressing beliefs that “it probably won’t happen again”, “it’s not that big of a deal”, or “the victim probably did something to deserve [being harmed]”, though 9% expected that someone else would most likely handle the situation.

Though males and females were almost equally disinclined to step in due to not knowing the best action to take, 69% of women feared making the situation worse compared to 46% of men. Additionally, 44% of women feared being harmed by the abuser, but men were not immune to this fear with 29% of males who responded in this section expressing this concern. Men were much more inclined than women to view the situation as “none of [their] business” (57% compared to 15%), and slightly more inclined to believe someone else will intervene (14% versus 5%).

A t-test revealed that only two experience items had significant differences in means with regard to reporting involvement in the scenario. Higher levels of experience of verbal abuse,  $t(97) = -2.99, p < .01$ , and thrown objects,  $t(97) = -2.81, p < .01$  were associated with unwillingness to get involved. Another t-test yielded only one significant difference for specific prevalence ratings, such that estimating more physical violence among OSU students was related to not wanting to get involved,  $t(96) = -2.11, p < .05$ . Ratings for definitions based on involvement revealed only one item for which the difference in means was significant, which was for excessive yelling or swearing,  $t(97) = 2.73, p < .05$ . There were no significant differences between involvement or non-involvement and perceptions of severity.

None of the mean differences based on reported involvement was statistically significant for empirical statements. Two of the six myth statements did reveal significant differences: participants who opted to intervene were less likely to agree that domestic

violence is a normal stress reaction,  $t(97) = -2.94, p < .01$ , or that abuse victims secretly want to be abused,  $t(97) = -2.26, p < .05$ .

### *Resources and Programs*

The majority of students reported no familiarity at all with three of the seven resources/programs examined, and only half identified one of the resources. These were SARNCO (Sexual Assault Response Network of Central Ohio, 90%), CHOICES (a shelter in the Columbus area for victims of IPA, 74%), “It’s Abuse” (a student-led program for raising awareness and promoting education about IPA on campus, 57%), and Campus Advocacy Program (a network of student volunteers who provide crisis intervention and support to victims of sexual and courtship violence, 50%). The three that were more often familiar to students were the Student Advocacy Center, Student Wellness Center, and Counseling and Consultation Services, none of which deal with abuse as a primary concern but serve as more general resources for students. Females were more likely than males to identify SARNCO,  $t(94) = -2.01, p < .05$ , and the Student Advocacy Center,  $t(93) = -2.05, p < .05$ . Very few significant correlations were observed between resource recognition and experiences; the interesting figures from this analysis was that greater familiarity with “It’s Abuse” was correlated with experiences of invasion of privacy/harassment/being followed,  $r(95) = .34, p < .01$ , thrown objects,  $r(96) = .23, p < .05$ , pushing/shoving/grabbing,  $r(96) = .26, p < .05$ , slapping/hitting/punching,  $r(95) = .24, p < .05$ , and sexual pressure,  $r(96) = .22, p < .05$ . Recognition of this resource was also related to higher estimates of both general prevalence,  $r(96) = .29, p < .01$ , and all but two of the specific behavior prevalence items (excluding yelling and ignoring).

### *Factor Analysis*

One of our objectives was to compute a factor analysis of the dependent measures to observe how the items theoretically relate to each other. Because communalities were not equal to 1, a principal axis factor analysis was used to analyze the latent structure of the computable items. Initially, the analysis extracted fifteen separate factors because some individual items seemed to serve as their own factors. When initial eigenvalues revealed that two factors explained more of the variance than any of the others, we computed a two factor solution and rotated factors using a direct oblimin procedure (to allow items to be correlated).

Factor 1 contained the following items: general estimates of prevalence and severity, estimates of the prevalence of specific behaviors, personal experience of abuse, resources specific to IPA and sexual assault, and a single empirical item (“society teaches boys to be aggressive”). Factor 2 contained the remaining items: definitions, myths vs. facts scale (minus the aforementioned item), and campus resources not specifically relevant to victims of IPA (such as Student Wellness Center). Intervention items were dichotomous items and therefore could not be included in the factor analysis.

### *Feedback*

Since this was a pilot study, we encouraged participants to provide feedback for reporting ambiguity or confusion. Thirty-six participants offered feedback about the survey with comments ranging from opinions about the issue to responses about specific items. Reactions were overwhelmingly positive with only one negatively valenced remark, and many respondents expressed gratitude about the nature of the research being performed. An example of one such comment was, *“I think the types of abuse listed were very thought-provoking; some of those I never would have thought of as abuse until you*

*mentioned it. It is scary to think that high percentages of OSU students could be experiencing these types of abuse. Thank you for your concern.*” Other students indicated clarity and comfort with the survey, reporting that it was “non-threatening” and that they appreciated being able to take it in privacy. Also, a transgendered participant noted that this was the only REP experiment s/he had encountered that offered more than one gender option.

Several participants did report confusion regarding some items and others offered suggestions for improvement. For example, one participant indicated that she wasn’t sure if affectionate play-fighting counted; another referenced consensual BDSM behaviors and the fact that certain behaviors we addressed would not be considered abuse in the appropriate context. Finally, a participant suggested investigating whether people in the sample are performing abuse.

### Discussion

This study had several dimensions. Since our broad objective was to determine Ohio State students’ thoughts and feelings about the general issue of intimate partner abuse, we developed an instrument of manageable length that incorporated some previously researched constructs to gather accurate data. The information obtained from the descriptive figures will serve as an important resource for individuals and departments who wish to know the current conditions of the matter at this university; accumulation of data over time will function as reference points for assessing change and gauging the effectiveness of educational and awareness efforts.

Analysis of specific items and their functions allowed us to gain insight into the complexities of how people think about IPA. It was important for us to begin with

definitions because the various ways in which people define an issue provides us with their general frame of reference and has implications for formulating attitudes. For the most part, items in this section were positively correlated with each other, suggesting consistency in ratings. One important finding in this domain was the lack of significant gender differences in mean ratings. A possible explanation for this is that college men and women are receiving and interpreting the same messages from popular culture about what constitutes abuse and therefore are reasonably in agreement about behaviors. Since Nabors et al. (2006) reported no significant findings with race, family income, parents' level of education, or parents' marital status, we might hypothesize that aspects of individual upbringing and culture may not hold as much weight for college students as may other components of U.S. culture at large, at least for this factor. However, it is necessary to investigate this claim further before drawing such conclusions, so future research into this aspect might incorporate items specifically designed to assess consumption of various cultural messages.

Another trend in the data was for participants to less frequently rate nonverbal behaviors as abusive (e.g., "giving a partner the silent treatment to get one's way in the relationship," "checking a partner's phone calls/texts/Facebook/email or excessively checking in with a partner," and "a partner showing up at places the other partner goes in order to keep track of him or her"). These items were intentionally worded to imply some level of control or manipulation. But what the data may suggest is that participants do not recognize the latent power and control issues behind some of these more "common" behaviors, particularly when the list contains more "obvious" behaviors, such as physical violence. This has especially important implications regarding technology, as newer

communication devices and services continue to make it easier to keep up with people's lives. The increasingly public nature of social and personal lives, combined with greater familiarity and frequency of technology in everyday life may be contributing to a shift in the way younger people view behaviors that once might have been viewed as blatant invasions of privacy. Still, this theory offers no explanation as to why a behavior such as giving the silent treatment *to get one's way in the relationship* was the lowest rated item on this measure. This particular finding may be rooted in a more general acceptance of this behavior; indeed, an idiom specifically for this action has developed in our language, which may speak to its overall pervasiveness. Furthermore, it may be that the silent treatment is already recognized as a blatant manipulation tactic for which most people are aware of the intention, and this in and of itself may lead to people's dismissal of this behavior as merely desperate and childish, rather than abusive. Finally, it is noteworthy that outing a same-sex partner to get one's way was rated rather highly on this measure by an almost entirely heterosexual sample. We think this implies that our participants have at least a basic sensitivity to the social and psychological complexities of being a sexual minority, particularly with regard to the coming out process.

Perhaps the most remarkable result of the entire study was the trend of negative correlations between experience of abuse and defining abuse behaviors. In addition, the experience items that yielded these significant correlations reflected higher-level violence, including all the physical items, sexual pressure, and both of the harm items. For example, experience of kicking/choking and rating of kicking/choking was the strongest negative correlation in the set, and this occurred despite the fact that kicking/choking had the highest mean rating on the definitional scale. Given such a

pattern, it may be that participants who experienced the greatest harm were trivializing the general concept of abuse as a means of psychologically protecting themselves. It can be very difficult for one to accept his or her status as a victim, so participants may have felt the need to rationalize experienced behaviors as context-dependent and not necessarily part of a system of “abuse.” This relationship and its possible implications present the need for further research into this issue.

Results from our attitudes and beliefs scale showed that OSU students are generally able to identify true statements regarding IPA, and were less likely to consider myths to be true. However, we did find some noteworthy exceptions to this overall trend. Of the six myth items, four represented excuses for abuse, and three were based in victim-blaming attitudes (the other two myth items centered on prevalence and may have produced results indicative of awareness rather than attitudes). Generally these items were rated comparatively low, but why did participants much more readily and consistently agree that “most people could find a way to get out of an abusive relationship if they really wanted to?” One possibility is that there are varying levels of social acceptability attached to each item, such as the overt sexism implied by a belief that women provoke violence toward their gender. However, as was previously considered, this could also be explained by an apparent lack of understanding of power and control issues and thus would represent a need for educating students about the mechanisms at work.

Gender differences regarding attitudes and beliefs were not as pronounced as we expected based on previous literature, but they nonetheless revealed interesting patterns especially when viewed as a function of experience. There were fewer significant

correlations between myth items and experience for women as compared to men, suggesting that women more consistently agree or disagree with myths independent of their personal experiences of IPA. The main result in this domain was that women who experienced more physical behaviors, threats, and intimidation tactics reported more agreement with the notion that some people secretly want to be abused. This could be the result of pervasive psychological manipulation, as the experiences reported include fear-based control behaviors such as intimidation and outright threats of violence. Or perhaps this finding is derived from personal and social guilt about not having left the relationship; as we observed, it is a rather commonly-held belief that abuse victims could simply get out of the relationship “if they really wanted to.” As one qualitative study found, former female abuse victims recalled feelings of intense shame and self-blame during their involvement in a violent partnership (Lindgren & Renck, 2008). It then stands to reason that this might be another tactic of “explaining away” based not only in the need to protect oneself, but one’s reputation as well.

On the other hand, the fact that men’s agreement with myths was related to experiencing abuse might offer new insight into the psychology of male victims. Since agreement that domestic violence is just a normal stress reaction was related to experiencing several high-level abuse items, it is possible that men are rationalizing their partners’ behavior, as we hypothesized earlier. In the particular case of men, it stands to reason that an additional desire for men to protect themselves from victim status exists that is largely based in stigmas regarding abuse of males by females. Men who experienced sexual pressure more readily agreed that some people secretly want to be abused and that women abuse men infrequently, the latter of which seems especially

contradictory. Due to the fact that our culture generally stereotypes men as wanting sex all the time, one way to view these data is that these men may be experiencing a high level of cognitive dissonance about their feelings and social messages, and thus subscribe to these myths as yet another means of protecting their egos. Finally, we suggest that men's agreement that "frequently, violence toward women happens because the woman provokes a fight" may have been correlated with the five experience items for two possible reasons. For one, this may simply be a function of these particular men having a greater familiarity with female-perpetrated abuse. But it could also imply in a roundabout way that these men either responded to their abusers in self-defense or actually performed abusive behaviors on their female partners which resulted in their partners acting in self-defense, but they report themselves as victims. This latter suggestion is not intended to be a victim-blaming assumption toward men; rather, it is meant to draw attention to the fact that male victimization has not been widely or specifically studied in the context of heterosexual relationships, and to highlight the need to investigate reported perpetration in future versions of this study.

Our hypothesis that experience of abuse would be positively correlated with higher estimates of prevalence was generally supported by the significant correlations that were observed between this item and all but two experience items (threat of exposing personal information and kicking/choking). Similarly, each personal experience item was significantly correlated with higher prevalence estimates for its comparable item/type of abuse in the section measuring prevalence estimates of specific behaviors as well as with the general statement. On the other hand, only some experience items significantly correlated with ratings of severity, and the ones that did do not appear to reflect any clear

pattern by of level or type of violence. What this might imply is that there is an availability heuristic at work for the occurrence of abuse, but this in itself does not seem to have an effect on students' beliefs about the severity of the issue.

There may be important implications for awareness efforts based in the gender findings for prevalence and severity ratings as well as intervention. Men tended to estimate lower prevalence for both general items, but when asked to give estimates of the rates of specific behaviors, there was only one significant gender difference observed. Given that we found no gender differences in definitions, these statistics seem to point out that males generally know what abuse is just as well as women do, but they don't fully appreciate the reality of the issue. It would appear that males are less aware of the scope of the issue unless they are required to think about it more deeply. The lack of perceived severity on the part of men might also explain why 57% of men who would not get involved believed it was none of their business to do so. If this theory is true, programs would do well to focus on general efforts to increase awareness, understanding of seriousness, and social responsibility rather than education that is specifically concerned with recognizing behaviors.

Based on responses to the intervention items, there is a clear need to educate students in how to appropriately respond to conflicts. It is promising that the vast majority of our participants said they would attempt to stop a scenario in which a stranger is being harmed by his or her partner, and the fact that nearly half of participants would check on the abused partner later may indicate a general sensitivity toward victims. However, the majority of respondents also directly indicated not knowing the best course of action to take, as well as expressing the fear that intervention would cause further

problems. It is possible that at least some participants may have felt that victims in the context of a violent episode are beyond any help they could offer. At any rate, the raw percentages from this section point to an additional need to educate concerned students about what they can do if they are inclined to help a victim.

Results of the factor analysis seem to suggest that items loaded on one of two factors based on how the items related to experience of abuse. This is further evidenced by the more consistent correlations between experience items and the other items on Factor 1, particularly regarding prevalence estimates and resources related to IPA and sexual assault. Factor loadings such as these reinforce the important role of experience or lack thereof in a study on this topic.

Finally, the feedback item allowed us to gauge that the items were generally well-understood by participants and that overall tone and implementation of the study was appropriately sensitive. We were pleased to receive such positive feedback and comfort regarding that which is surely a delicate topic for many, even those with no direct or indirect experience with IPA. The suggestions for further research were helpful and often reflected tentative plans for future studies, such as investigating perpetration. It was encouraging to see that students are on the same page as we are regarding the direction and development of this and other related studies.

### *Limitations*

There were a few limitations to this study. One such limitation that affected the data as a whole was the small size of the sample. Although we had enough participants to compute significant analyses for the overall sample, it was not possible to break down the sample and test differences between different demographics. We were interested in

observing trends involving LGBTQ students' attitudes, beliefs, and experiences, but the characteristics of the sample were such that only three participants identified as non-heterosexual and only two identified as transgender (and were not provided with the opportunity to indicate their identified gender orientations). It is possible that some students, particularly younger ones, are still coming to terms with their sexual identities and therefore may have been reluctant to identify as LGBTQ on our survey. Our sample actually reflected higher percentages of most ethnic minority groups than we would typically expect to see based on OSU enrollment figures (Office of Institutional Research and Planning Statistical Summary, Autumn 2008), but a larger overall sample is needed to have enough statistical power and variability to break down by variables such as ethnicity. Since this study will eventually be replicated with a random sample of 10,000 students throughout the entire university (and such studies typically have a response rate of 25%), it is likely that issues based in sample size will resolve themselves. However, in the future it may be necessary to differentially recruit Hispanic students if random samples do not report high enough percentages for this group.

Another characteristic of the sample involved the overrepresentation of first and second-year students. This was expected due to the fact that we recruited participants from an introductory level course. As previously mentioned, existing research has revealed trends regarding poorer myth and behavioral recognition among students who were not as far along in their university education (Nabors et al., 2006). It then stands to reason that the three-quarters of the sample who were first or second-year students may have skewed the data to some degree. Again, since this study will be administered to large random samples in the future, this is not a great concern for examining the structure

of the survey at this point. It may even prove valuable to have many younger students in our pilot because one of the current goals of the program is to target first-year students particularly through programming based in the residence halls.

Since designing the survey, we have identified several structural issues that may have affected our results. The response options for the definition items were rated “never abuse,” “it depends on the situation,” and “always abuse” and coded 0-2 respectively. After observing that all items except one had mean ratings greater than 1, it is possible that the range of responses was too restrictive. Additionally, the wording of the response options may have been leading or too extreme, thus forcing participants to select an answer that was not necessarily indicative of their true opinions. The suggested solution is to redesign the responses on a scale of five points or more and to incorporate moderate options for classification, such as “usually,” “sometimes,” or “rarely.”

Another possible area for revision is observed in the response options for both the general and behavior-specific items for estimating prevalence. These sections allowed for responses on a five-point scale, but each response included a verbal statement combined with a percentage for that response, i.e. “none (0-20%).” This is problematic for two reasons. First, not everyone is likely to agree with the matching of the percentages with the statements, such as 20% representing “none.” In fact, since this particular example would reflect one-fifth of the population, we can argue that 20% is indeed quite a few people. This leads us into a second issue, being that we do not know whether participants were responding based on the percentage or the verbal statement. It is very likely that these items not only served to confuse our participants but also possibly led to inconsistencies in our data. It is suggested for future revisions that only percentages be

used for such estimates in order to compare estimates to actual rates based on percentages and to avoid the subjective nature of verbal statements.

Overall, this study provided us with a first look into the thoughts and feelings of OSU students regarding the sensitive and often-avoided topic of intimate partner abuse. In exploring how students process and respond to this issue, we can use our newfound insight to reach out to students in relevant and effective ways with the goal of changing minds and increasing concern and knowledge about IPA. Furthermore, the previously unexplored characteristics we observed can aid in developing new directions for research and understanding this issue on an empirical level.

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Table 1.  
*Means and Standard Deviations of Definitions*

Item	Mean	SD
Excessive yelling or swearing	1.61	.550
Intentional insults, put-downs, or name-calling	1.60	.552
Checking a partner's phone calls/texts/Facebook/email or excessively checking in with a partner	1.13	.633
A partner showing up at places the other partner goes in order to keep track of him/her	1.34	.625
Threatening to share personal information or secrets with others	1.66	.556
Giving a partner the silent treatment to get one's way in the relationship	.95	.676
Threatening to "out" (exposing someone as not being heterosexual) a partner to get one's way in the relationship	1.76	.555
Destroying a partner's things to intimidate him/her	1.79	.480
Throwing an object at a partner	1.68	.531
Pushing, shoving, or grabbing	1.65	.559
Slapping, hitting, or punching	1.75	.481
Kicking or choking	1.84	.445
Pressuring a partner sexually	1.77	.470
Threatening to use violence, with or without a weapon	1.83	.455

*Note.* The range of the scale is 0-2, where higher scores indicate stronger definition.

Table 2.  
*Pearson Correlation Table: Experiences and Definitions of Abuse*

	Exp. Yell, swear, insult	Exp. Check or follow	Exp. Threat info	Exp. Destroy things	Exp. Throw object	Exp. Push, shove, or grab	Exp. Slap, hit, or punch	Exp. Kick or choke	Exp. Pressure sex	Exp. Threat violence	Exp. Harm req. med care	Exp. Harm req. psych
Def. Yell/ Swear	-.079	.047	-.034	-.117	-.205*	-.165	-.121	-.203*	-.121	-.202*	-.081	-.084
Def. Insult	-.021	-.002	-.090	.059	-.140	-.072	-.122	-.043	-.043	-.097	-.029	.002
Def. Check	-.119	.094	-.009	-.080	-.099	-.190	-.269**	-.242*	-.014	-.243*	-.146	-.244*
Def. Show up	-.149	.055	-.097	-.113	-.113	-.168	-.103	-.195	-.066	-.100	-.156	-.183
Def. Threat info	.042	-.034	-.074	-.067	-.097	.002	-.059	-.028	-.011	-.059	-.192	-.114
Def. Silent	-.138	-.012	.007	-.040	-.149	-.050	-.026	-.129	-.036	-.015	.093	-.008
Def. Threat "out"	-.047	-.026	-.156	-.193	-.108	-.189	-.278**	-.327**	-.163	-.245*	-.343**	-.294**
Def. Destroy things	.073	-.004	-.098	-.151	-.005	-.007	.009	-.122	.028	-.105	-.247*	-.177
Def. Throw object	-.027	-.111	-.095	-.172	-.139	-.213*	-.132	-.162	-.233*	-.204*	-.212*	-.215*
Def. Push, shove, grab	-.115	-.068	-.060	-.086	-.138	-.232*	-.220*	-.231*	-.194	-.275**	-.231*	-.194
Def. Kick or choke	-.085	.030	-.196	-.276**	-.223*	-.296**	-.245*	-.435**	-.107	-.367**	-.426**	-.378**
Def. Pressure Sex	-.031	-.082	-.193	-.138	-.162	-.234*	-.279**	-.287**	-.166	-.238*	-.249*	-.213*
Def. Threat violence	-.033	.026	-.142	-.194	-.023	-.100	-.053	-.321**	-.017	-.201*	-.240*	-.167

*Note.* Items are abbreviated or paraphrased. See Appendix for complete item texts.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Table 3.  
*Attitudes and Beliefs Measures: Mean Ratings of Empirical and Myth Items*

Item	Mean	SD
<i>Empirical Statements</i>		
People who are violent toward their family members are not likely to change.	2.49	1.115
People who shout, yell, or curse at their partners are likely to become physically violent eventually.	2.53	1.071
Society teaches boys to be aggressive.	2.67	1.030
Most people who act physically aggressive toward their family members have psychological or personality problems.	2.81	.888
Some people learn to be violent because they experienced or witnessed violence in their homes when they were young.	3.24	.886
<i>Myth Statements</i>		
A lot of what is called "domestic violence" is just a normal reaction to day-to-day stress.	.82	.983
Frequently, violence towards women happens because the woman provokes a fight.	1.16	1.149
Some people who are abused secretly want to be treated that way.	1.30	1.216
Most people could find a way out of an abusive relationship if they really wanted to.	2.31	1.291
Abuse is less common in same-sex couples.	1.43	.971
In relationships, women abuse men infrequently.	1.43	.894

*Note.* The range of this scale is 0-4, where 0 = "Strongly disagree" and 4 = "Strongly agree".

Table 4.  
*Pearson Correlation Table: Myths and Definitions*

	DV is a normal stress reaction	Women provoke violence	Some people secretly want to be abused	Most ppl. could get out of abusive rel. if they wanted to	Abuse is less common in same-sex relationships	Women abuse men infrequently
Excessive yell/swear	-.398**	-.302**	-.262**	-.098	-.116	-.147
Insults, put-downs	-.287**	-.137	-.241*	-.050	-.164	-.199*
Excessive checking	-.224*	-.156	-.185	-.176	.039	-.084
Showing up in places	-.329**	-.192	-.192	-.223*	-.131	-.105
Threat to share info	-.339**	-.232*	-.237*	-.105	-.250*	-.230*
Silent treatment	-.229*	-.147	-.105	-.227*	.080	-.082
Threat to "out" partner	-.381**	-.194	-.238*	-.135	-.219*	-.074
Destroying things	-.256*	-.122	-.134	-.089	-.195	-.211*
Throwing object	-.348**	-.198*	-.210*	-.089	-.180	-.153
Push, shove, or grab	-.341**	-.228*	-.291**	-.184	-.090	-.180
Slap, hit, or punch	-.335**	-.202*	-.217*	-.151	-.134	-.098
Kicking or choking	-.394**	-.228*	-.210*	-.018	-.190	-.104
Pressuring sexually	-.379**	-.232*	-.286**	-.114	-.224*	-.170
Threatening violence	-.393**	-.122	-.190	-.119	-.133	-.023

*Note.* Items are paraphrased or abbreviated. See Appendix for complete item texts.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Table 5.  
*Pearson Correlation Table: Estimates of Prevalence and Experience of Abuse*

	Est. Yelling or screaming	Est. Extreme jealousy	Est. Physical violence	Est. Forced sex	Est. Insult, put-down, ridicule	Est. Ignore or withhold affection	Est. Stalk or harass	Est. General Prev.
Exp. Yell or insult	.344**	.152	.399**	.272**	.349**	.362**	.340**	.367**
Exp. Check or follow	.108	.209*	.248*	.160	.133	.042	.283**	.313*
Exp. Threat info	-.030	.041	.236*	.178	.118	.123	.240*	.144
Exp. Destroy things	.138	.095	.365**	.276**	.189	.219	.249*	.316**
Exp. Throw object	.260**	.255*	.481**	.203*	.352**	.256*	.386**	.348**
Exp. Push, shove, or grab	.216*	.201*	.453**	.348**	.276**	.238*	.378**	.415**
Exp. Slap, hit, or punch	.095	.125	.330**	.283**	.197	.086	.351**	.244
Exp. Kick or choke	.161	.085	.342**	.213*	.165	.167	.166	.135
Exp. Pressure sex	.121	.223*	.252*	.258*	.131	.232*	.197	.304**
Exp. Threat violence	.147	.154	.395**	.244*	.260**	.178	.310**	.279**
Exp. Harm req. med care	.069	.006	.429**	.259*	.169	.118	.223*	.268**
Exp. Harm req. psych care	-.001	-.068	.272**	.233*	.106	.029	.133	.214*

*Note:* Items are paraphrased or abbreviated. See Appendix for complete item descriptions.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$

Table 6.  
*Experiences of Abuse*

Experience	Never	Yes, but not in the past 12 months	1-4 times in past year	5-12 times in past year	Several times a month	Several times a week
Excessive yelling or swearing, intentional insults, put-downs, or name-calling	64.6	20.2	6.1	4.0	3.0	2.0
Checking your phone calls/texts/Facebook/email, excessively checking in with you or your friends, or following you around town	54.5	22.2	12.2	4.1	5.1	1.0
Threatening to share personal information/secrets with others	81.6	11.2	7.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Destroying your things	83.8	9.1	6.1	0.0	1.0	0.0
Throwing an object at you	74.7	13.1	7.1	2.0	2.0	1.0
Pushing, shoving, or grabbing	76.8	11.1	8.1	2.0	2.0	1.0
Slapping, hitting, or punching	73.5	14.3	7.1	3.1	1.0	1.0
Kicking or choking	85.7	9.2	4.1	0.0	1.0	0.0
Pressuring you sexually	63.6	15.2	13.1	5.1	3.0	0.0
Threatening to use violence, with or without a weapon	86.9	6.1	3.0	3.0	1.0	0.0
Harm requiring medical care	91.8	5.1	3.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Harm requiring psychological care/counseling	88.9	7.1	4.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

*Note.* Numbers reflect percentages.

Table 7.  
*Factor Matrix: Principal Axis Factoring*

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2
How severe of an issue do you think abuse/violence in intimate relationships is for Ohio State Students at this time?	.457	.264
How many students at Ohio State do you think encounter issues of violence or abuse in their relationships?	.701	.293
Definition: Excessive yelling or swearing	-.018	.523
Definition: Intentional insults, put-downs, or name-calling	-.111	.535
Definition: Checking a partner's phone calls/texts/Facebook/email or excessively checking in with a partner	-.089	.507
Definition: A partner showing up at places the other partner goes in order to keep track of him/her	-.040	.501
Definition: Threatening to share personal information or secrets with others	.000	.535
Definition: Giving a partner the silent treatment to get one's way in the relationship	-.011	.308
Definition: Threatening to "out" (exposing someone as not being heterosexual) a partner to get one's way in the relationship	-.123	.807
Definition: Destroying a partner's things to intimidate him/her	-.057	.455
Definition: Throwing an object at a partner	-.191	.605
Definition: Pushing, shoving, or grabbing	-.213	.577
Definition: Slapping, hitting, or punching	-.154	.646
Definition: Kicking or choking	-.077	.748
Definition: Pressuring a partner sexually	-.126	.715
Definition: Threatening to use violence, with or without a weapon	-.123	.548
People who are violent toward their family members are not likely to change	.109	.285
People who shout, yell, or curse at their partners are likely to become physically violent eventually.	.026	.125
Society teaches boys to be aggressive	.184	.136
A lot of what is called "domestic violence" is just a normal reaction to day-to-day stress	.091	-.436
Frequently, violence towards women happens because the woman provokes a fight	.159	-.371
Some people who are abused secretly want to be treated that way	.223	-.317
Most people could find a way to get out of an abusive relationship if they really wanted to	-.195	-.236
Most people who act physically aggressive toward their family members have psychological or personality problems	-.030	.170
Abuse is less common in same-sex couples	.081	-.211

(table continues)

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2
In relationships, women abuse men infrequently	-.123	-.287
Some people learn to be violent because they experienced or witnessed violence in their homes when they were young	.035	.418
OSU Counseling and Consultation Services (CCS)	-.043	.164
Student Wellness Center	.139	.319
Student Advocacy Center	.098	.223
Campus Advocacy Program (CAP)	.184	.207
CHOICES	.064	.071
SARNCO	.353	.095
It's Abuse.	.450	.212
Experience: Excessive yelling or swearing, intentional insults, put-downs, or name-calling	.567	.032
Experience: Checking your phone calls/texts/facebook/email, excessively checking in with you or your friends, or following you around town	.454	-.005
Experience: Threatening to share personal information/secrets with others	.548	-.081
Experience: Destroying your things	.619	-.095
Experience: Throwing an object at you	.719	-.056
Experience: Pushing, shoving, or grabbing	.841	-.104
Experience: Slapping, hitting, or punching	.690	-.265
Experience: Kicking or choking	.630	-.091
Experience: Pressuring you sexually	.596	-.067
Experience: Threatening to use violence, with or without a weapon	.635	-.131
Experience: Harm requiring medical care	.685	-.140
Experience: Harm requiring psychological care/counseling	.517	-.250
OSU: Often yelling or screaming during arguments	.409	.325
OSU: Extreme and unwarranted jealousy	.375	.340
OSU: Physical violence	.665	.272
OSU: Forced sex	.558	.254
OSU: Insults, put-downs, humiliation, or ridicule	.565	.388
OSU: Regularly withholding affection to get one's way	.365	.406
OSU: Stalking or harassment by a partner or former partner	.613	.242

## Appendix

## Survey

Thank you for agreeing to participate in our survey. In the following pages you will answer questions about your thoughts and feelings about intimate partner abuse. As you do so, please keep a few things in mind.

We are interested in your *own personal* thoughts and feelings about abuse, so it is important that you answer as honestly and accurately as possible. Please do not feel pressure to answer in a “correct” way. As a reminder, your answers are completely confidential and will not be connected to your identity. You also may skip any items that you do not wish to answer.

In this survey, when we use the word “partner” or “partners” we are referring to one or both members of a couple who may be of any gender or sexual orientation. Also, when we refer to an “intimate relationship” we are simply referring to two people who are romantically involved with each other, with or without sex. You will have a chance at the end of the survey to comment on any items you found confusing or vague.

**\*1. How severe of an issue do you think abuse or violence in intimate relationships is for Ohio State students *at this time*?**

0	1	2	3	4
Not Severe	Mild	Moderately Severe	Severe	Very Severe

**2. How many students at Ohio State do you think encounter issues of violence or abuse in their relationships?**

- a) None (0-20%)
- b) Few (21-40%)
- c) Some (41-60%)
- d) Many (61-80%)
- e) Most (81-100%)

**\*\*3. Please consider each of the following situations in the context of an intimate relationship. Indicate whether you consider each of the items below to be abuse using the following scale:**

- a) Excessive yelling or swearing
  - b) Intentional insults, put-downs, or name-calling
  - c) Checking a partner's phone calls/texts/Facebook/email or excessively checking in with a partner
  - d) A partner showing up at places the other partner goes in order to keep track of him/her
  - e) Threatening to share personal information or secrets with others
  - f) Giving a partner the silent treatment to get one's way in the relationship
  - g) Threatening to "out" (exposing someone as not being heterosexual) a partner to get one's way in the relationship
  - h) Destroying a partner's things to intimidate him/her
  - i) Throwing an object at a partner
  - j) Pushing, shoving, or grabbing
  - k) Slapping, hitting, or punching
  - l) Kicking or choking
  - m) Pressuring a partner sexually
  - n) Threatening to use violence, with or without a weapon
- 
- a) Never abuse
  - b) It depends on the situation
  - c) Always abuse

**\*\*4. People have different ideas about abuse in intimate relationships. Please rate your level of agreement with each statement.**

- a) People who are violent toward their family members are not likely to change.
- b) People who shout, yell, or curse at their partners are likely to become physically violent eventually.
- c) Society teaches boys to be aggressive.
- d) A lot of what is called “domestic violence” is just a normal reaction to day-to-day stress.
- e) Frequently, violence towards women happens because the woman provokes a fight.
- f) Some people who are abused secretly want to be treated that way.
- g) Most people could find a way to get out of an abusive relationship if they really wanted to.
- h) Most people who act physically aggressive toward family members have psychological or personality problems.
- i) Abuse is less common among same-sex couples.
- j) In relationships, women abuse men infrequently.
- k) Some people learn to be violent because they experienced or witnessed violence in their homes when they were young.

0                      1                      2                      3                      4

Strongly Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Neither Agree Nor Disagree, Somewhat Agree, Strongly Agree

**Consider the following scenario:**

One night while you are at home by yourself, you overhear an incident occurring between the couple next door. Based on what you are hearing, you are certain that one partner is abusing the other. You do not personally know either of the people involved.

**\*\*5. People choose to react differently to situations such as this one. How would you react?**

- a) I would not get involved at all
- b) Bang on the wall
- c) Knock on the door and confront the couple
- d) Attempt to get the victim out of there
- e) Attempt to get the abuser out of there
- f) Talk to the victim at a later time
- g) Talk to the abuser at a later time
- h) Talk to both together at a later time
- i) Call the police
- j) Notify an RA
- k) Call a domestic violence hotline
- l) I don't know

**\*\*5a. If you chose not to get involved, what influenced your decision? Check all that apply.**

- a) It's none of my business
- b) I would be afraid it would make the situation worse
- c) It's not that big of a deal
- d) I would be afraid of being harmed by the abuser in some way
- e) I am unsure of the best action to take
- f) The victim probably did something to deserve it
- g) It probably won't happen again
- h) I don't know either of them
- i) Someone else will probably step in
- j) I don't know

**\*\*6. Please indicate if you have heard of each of the following and if you know what they do:**

- a) OSU Counseling and Consultation Services (CCS)
- b) Student Wellness Center
- c) Student Advocacy Center
- d) Campus Advocacy Program (CAP)
- e) CHOICES
- f) SARNCO
- g) It's Abuse.

- a) I have never heard of this resource or program
- b) I have heard of this resource or program, but I am not familiar with what they do
- c) I have heard of this resource or program and I know what they do
- d) I have volunteered/worked for this resource or program.

**\*\*7. Have you personally experienced any of the following behaviors from a current or former dating partner?**

- a) Excessive yelling or swearing, intentional insults, put-downs, or name-calling
- b) Checking your phone calls/texts/facebook/email, excessively checking in with you or your friends, or following you around town
- c) Threatening to share personal information/secrets with others
- d) Destroying your things
- e) Throwing an object at you
- f) Pushing, shoving, or grabbing
- g) Slapping, hitting, or punching
- h) Kicking or choking
- i) Pressuring you sexually
- j) Threatening to use violence, with or without a weapon
- k) Harm requiring medical care
- l) Harm requiring psychological care/counseling
- m) Other

- a) I have never experienced this
- b) I have experienced this but not in the past 12 months
- c) 1-4 times in the past 12 months
- d) 5-12 times in the past 12 months
- e) Several times a month
- f) Several times a week

**\*\*8. Using the following scale, in your opinion how many OSU couples experience each of the below:**

- a) Often yelling or screaming during arguments
- b) Extreme and unwarranted jealousy
- c) Physical violence
- d) Forced sex
- e) Insults, put-downs, humiliation, or ridicule
- f) Regularly ignoring or withholding affection to get one's own way
- g) Stalking or harassment by a partner or former partner

0	1	2	3	4
None	Few	Some	Many	Most
(0-20%)	(21-40%)	(41-60%)	(61-80%)	(81-100%)

**9. What is your gender?**

- a) Male
- b) Female
- c) Transgender
- d) Intersex
- e) Other/self-identified

**10. What is your sexual orientation?**

- a) Heterosexual
- b) Bisexual or Pansexual
- c) Homosexual
- d) Uncertain or Questioning
- e) Other or Self-identified

**11. When were you born?**

(fill in month and year)

**12. What is your race/ethnicity?**

- a) African-American/Black
- b) Asian-American/Pacific Islander
- c) Caucasian/White
- d) Hispanic/Latino/a
- e) Native American/American Indian
- f) Multi-racial
- g) Other

**13. Are you an international student?**

- a) Yes
- b) No

**14. What is your year in college?**

- a) First
- b) Second
- c) Third
- d) Fourth
- e) Fifth or beyond

**15. Where do you live while classes are in session?**

- a) Residence halls/dorms
- b) Fraternity or Sorority housing
- c) Off-campus (i.e. an apartment)
- d) With parents or other relatives

**16. What is your relationship status?**

- a) I am currently in a relationship.
- b) I am not currently in a relationship but I was at some point in the past year.
- c) I have not been in a relationship in the past year but I have been in one in the past.
- d) I have never been in a relationship.
- e) Unsure

**\*\*\*17. Overall, do you feel that you answered these questions as honestly and accurately as possible?**

- a) Yes
- b) No

**18. Please use this space to provide constructive feedback about this survey. Be sure to comment on any items you found confusing or vague.**

(open ended)

\* Numbers did not appear with the response options in the actual survey.

\*\* Items were rotated in these sections.

\*\*\* This item was presented on the same page as the feedback item in hopes that participants would not think that answering “no” would penalize them.