

Case Study: Intimate Partner Violence in College at the Intersection of Gender and Sexual Orientation

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Over the course of the fall semester, students have called campus police several times related to disturbances between students, Matt and Mario. The altercations have become more violent each time. Matt and Mario are in several classes together this semester. They are seen often together and have the same address in Banner. The student Health center has treated Mario for minor injuries and Matt was sent to student conduct for his aggressive behavior, the last most violent incident happened in the campus parking lot. He is currently on disciplinary probation and is facing suspension if another incident occurs. Dr. Santiago, Dean of Students, offered Mario the opportunity to change class sections, but was resistant to the idea. Dr. Santiago believes there was more to the story and called Campus Police Officer Lydia Santorini in to discuss the matter. Both women believed that this was a case of intimate partner abuse between the roommate, but when Office Santorini brought it up to her fellow officers and supervisor, who are all men, they laughed it off and made bigoted remarks about the LGBT Community. Dr. Santiago and officer Santorini shared their concerns with each other and made plans to intervene.

Mario shows up to class with the appearance that his face had been hit multiple times. The Instructor appropriately refers this concern to the Dean of Students Office and Dr. Santiago made the decision to implement an interim suspension that banned Matt from campus pending the outcome of an investigation. Dr. Santiago took Mario aside and had a serious conversation with him during which he revealed that he and Matt were, indeed, in a relationship and that it has gradually become more and more abusive. Mario described the typical progression of an abusive relationship. He and Matt had met in high school and had been dating since. Mario was just starting to explore his sexuality and it was his first relationship, serious or otherwise. He was enamored of being with someone who understood him. The relationship seemed good in the beginning, but Mario realized in hindsight, there were warning signs of Matt's true personality early on.

With all these details revealed, Dr. Santiago referred Mario to counseling on-campus and he regularly attended sessions with his counselor, Dr. Rivera. Dr. Rivera was a specialist in both domestic abuse counseling and LGBTQ mental health services. Mario's long term depression was improving and he was doing better in classes. He did disclose to Dr. Rivera that he still loved Matt and sometimes hoped they could repair their relationship.

The Title IX investigation was progressing from the last incident and Matt's no trespass order for campus was still in effect.

A couple of weeks later, Dr. Santiago received a visit from Marion. He thanks her for her help but reported that he has seen Matt several times in town, and believed Matt was stalking him. Dr. Santiago assured Mario that if Matt entered the campus, the campus police would detain and escort him off the premises. However, she needed to do some research about the city processes. She asked him to return at the end of the week to see what she found out. Sadly, she did not find much help. The battered women's shelter stated they would not admit men, as the presence of a male would be disturbing to the women residents there. The local police said they could not do anything unless Matt actually attacked Mario while he was off campus. They also expressed skepticism that Mario, a healthy young man, could not take care of himself. Dr. Santiago felt frustrated.