

3.2: Harmful Language Slide

Media is one way in which violence is normalized in a culture, but our day-to-day language can also have a significant impact in normalizing violence. You've probably heard, and perhaps even used slang like: "I raped that exam," "I'd hit that," "That's so gay," "That's retarded," "I stalked him/her on Facebook," etc. Slang like this is commonplace, but can be very harmful and perpetuates a community's tolerance of inappropriate attitudes and behaviors.

Gender roles and constructs are also reinforced by inappropriate language. For example, women who are assertive or opinionated and don't abide by the roles they are expected to adhere to are called names like "bitch," or "feminazi." When they aren't sexually submissive or are deemed to have too active a sexual lifestyle, women are often referred to as "sluts," "whores," or worse; very negative and offensive terms.

In contrast, there are almost no offensive terms for men who are seen to be sexually dominant, aggressive, or promiscuous. Frequently, these men are referred to as or "studs," "pimps," and the like - generally considered by most to be complimentary. When men don't act dominant or aggressive - they are called names that are considered to be feminine - like "girly" or "bitch."

The problem is that many people don't stop to think about how offensive this language actually is which only serves to reinforce the idea that sexual violence (and violence in general) is just a part of life. Here at UC Davis, we can choose to raise the demeanor of our language, and help to mitigate its harmful impact.