



## Shifting Social Norms using Bystander Intervention

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### Topics

- The big picture: issues underlying Elder Abuse
- Definitions of active and passive bystander behavior
- Bystander intervention research and theory
- Social norms and bystander behavior
- Bystander intervention skills
- Case study examples

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### What is the greatest asset of your community?

The values and ideals of its members

Most people care and want to do what is right

Most people are uncomfortable with unwanted behaviours and social injustice

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Our goal is to focus on the positive in order to transform the negative

Human beings are not inherently violent

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Elder abuse can be reduced  
or prevented by active  
bystanders

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### Some Underlying Issues to Consider

- Relation of ageism to ableism
- Materialism and glorification of the body (i.e. what gives "value" to a person?)
- Displacement of caregiver stress
- Denial/prejudices about vulnerability
- Protective and self-sacrificing parental values

*All of these issues are "in" us as well as "in" the situations we are trying to address and each one also has a cultural component*

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### Caregiver Issues to Consider

- Displacement of caregiver stress
- Lack of patience
- Sense of entitlement/privilege
- Caregiver experience of prejudice, mistreatment, etc.

Incidents are associated with "feelings of frustration, anger and despair" on the part of the caregiver

*We can intervene compassionately and non-judgmentally with the caregiver without being enabling*

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### Bystanders can make a difference

- A passive bystander is someone who “stands by” and does not do anything when they *notice* a problematic situation or behaviour even though they may find it to be problematic.
- For almost all health and social justice problems there are bystanders
- Bystanders who act have the ability to create an inhospitable climate for risk behaviors and their perpetrators and to intervene to prevent harm

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### Bystander Intervention Contexts

- To prevent a elder abuse (in family and institutional environments)
- To notice warning signs of elder abuse
- To interrupt inappropriate remarks and behaviours including ageism and ableism
- To support and empathize with caregivers
- To address inter-related social justice issues (racism, classism, sexism, etc.)
- To undermine and contradict underlying cultural issues

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### Key Points

- Bystanders are in a position to actively intervene to prevent unwanted behaviours and shift the climate that permits them
- Individuals can be taught to overcome their inhibitions to intervene and learn skills to do so effectively
- Most people underestimate the willingness of their peers to “be part of the solution” and the norms of their community that would support intervention

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### Levels of Bystander Behaviour

- To an individual
- To a group
- To a system or institution

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### Stages of Bystander Behaviour

- Notice the event
- Interpret it as a problem
- Feel responsible for dealing with it
- Have the necessary skills to act

(SNCit: see it, name it, check it)

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### Reasons for Being a Passive Bystander

- Assume that it isn't a problem because others are not observed intervening (social influence)
- Fear of embarrassment (audience inhibition)
- Assume that someone else will do something (diffusion of responsibility)
- Believe that others' aren't bothered (social norms)
- Fear of retaliation or negative outcomes

*When uncorrected these inhibit the desire to help (the bystander effect)*

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### Social Norms

- “Social norms” refer to the acceptability of an action or belief
- Are unspoken rules about what is “normal” for that group or setting
- Perceptions of social norms predict what people say and do
- “For a norm to be real, it is not necessary for the majority to believe it, but only for the majority to believe that the majority believes it.”

*What are the norms that support or would inhibit elder abuse and are they perceived correctly?*

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### Effects of Norm Misperceptions

- Perceptions of what others believe and do are strongly correlated with behaviour, predicting subsequent alcohol use, substance use, sexual behaviour, gambling, seat belt use, academic performance, etc.
- Abusers/misbehavers over-perceive negative attitudes and behaviour the most and use this to justify their own behaviour
- Interventions to correct misperceptions with individuals, groups, and communities have been successful in reducing use and abuse of alcohol, cigarette smoking, to increase seat belt use, to foster green behaviours and to inhibit sexual aggression.

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### Social Norms: Underlying Beliefs

- **Pluralistic Ignorance:** the incorrect belief that one's private attitudes, judgments or behavior are different from others
- **False Consensus:** the incorrect belief that one represents the majority when one is actually a minority

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### Misperceptions Influence Behavior

- Individuals over-estimate others' negative behaviours and under-estimate positive behaviors. (is this true for elder abuse?)
- Most people under-estimate others' willingness to intervene, discomfort with risk behaviors, sympathy for victims, respect for someone who intervenes, etc.
- Do leaders use language that reinforces or corrects the misperception? How do we talk about the problem? Who are the "carriers of the misperception,"?
- Research has documented that misperceptions occur and influence behaviour in middle and high schools, colleges, universities, communities and the military, in numerous countries and for a multiplicity of issues and that social norms media campaigns and group interventions can shift behaviour and foster bystander intervention.

*What misperceptions exist for elder abuse and how would they impact bystander behaviour?*

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### College Men's Attitudes about Rape Florida State University

	% who disagree	
	Actual Norm (Self)	Perceived Norm (Most guys)
It is only women who dress suggestively that are raped	79%	44%
If a woman is willing to go home with a man consent to have sex is implied	73%	35%
A lot of women lead a guy on and then cry rape	61%	45%

Notice the "gap" between perception and reality

Florida State University Sexual Violence Prevention Survey

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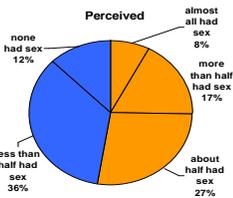
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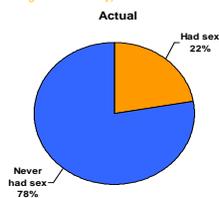
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### Girls perceived v. actual intercourse

By the end of the eighth grade, how many girls do you think have had sexual intercourse?



Have you ever had sexual intercourse (had sex, made love, gone all the way)?



Girls who thought that "almost all had sex" were ten times more likely to have had sex themselves

8<sup>th</sup> grade girls, surveyed June 2002 by PPNYC

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THINK AGAIN -

THE TRUTH IS,  
MOST PS 140 6TH-8TH  
GRADERS THINK SEX  
IS FOR ADULTS

"According to a September 2002 survey of PS140 6-8th graders, 67% believe that sexual intercourse is for adults in committed or married relationships."

HOLD BACK  
DON'T SAY SEX TO YOUR FRIENDS AND PARTNERS

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**What Misperceptions Might be Relevant to Elder Abuse?**

- When someone would want you to intervene on their behalf
- Whether someone who intervenes would be respected and supported
- What kind of recompense is appropriate for a care-giver
- If the problem is over or under-estimated
- If abuser attitudes are shared by the community

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**Misperceptions and Bystander Behaviour**

- Individuals are bothered by problem behaviours but underestimate other's discomfort with them and desire to have someone intervene
- Intervention is more likely when others are perceived as willing to intervene
- Problem individuals use the misperception to justify their behaviour and keep others from intervening

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## False Consensus Norms

Individuals who engage in problem behaviour overestimate other's support for their attitudes and actions, i.e.

- Perpetrators of domestic violence
- Men who sexually assault
- Problem drinkers
- Gamblers
- People who engage in risk behaviors

Perpetrator overestimations predict subsequent problem behaviour.

A false consensus norm constitutes  
a "self-serving bias"

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## Conclusion

Underestimating other's concern results in less chance of intervening on the part of bystanders

*(pluralistic ignorance)*

Overestimating other's comfort with problem behaviour results in more chance of problem behaviour

*(false consensus)*

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## Part 2

### Strategies for Responding to Unwelcome Remarks and Behaviours

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### Intervention Options

- Direct versus Indirect: Talk to the person directly or to others
- On the spot or later: Do something right away or wait
- Types of interventions
  - Confront the person/impose consequences, state feelings
  - Shift the focus (change the situation)
  - Shift the person (change the person)
  - Talk to or inform a third party

Goal: To have more options for responding and feel better about your response

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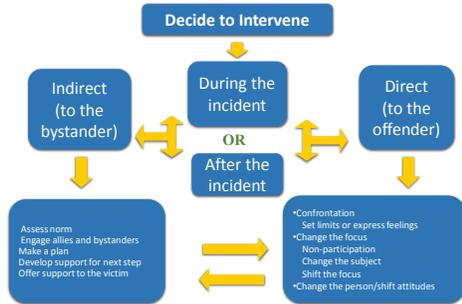
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### Positive Intervention Options



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### Confrontation

Make it clear that certain behaviours and remarks are not appropriate and will not be tolerated

and/or

Forcefully tell the other person how you feel about their actions

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**Shifting the Focus  
(Changing the Situation)**

- Non-participation
- Deflection (change the subject)
- Shift the focus  
(address the underlying assumption)

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**Changing the Person  
("Shifting Attitudes")**

- Is non-confrontational
- Uses "open conversation"
- Helps the person understand *why* the behaviour is problematic
- Fosters deeper change

([www.ncbi.org](http://www.ncbi.org))

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**Case Study Examples**

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## UCM EPIC Program

Encouraging Positive Interventions in Chapters

- Collect actual and perceived norms in Greek chapters for alcohol-related bystander scenarios
- Share results of data with chapters in tailored workshops
- Social norms media campaign
- Active BI Video contest
- Also offered as an in-class program on sexual assault for first year students

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## Data Collected

- Norms for alcohol use
- When I would like someone to intervene on my behalf
- When I would intervene in a situation
- How much I am bothered by risky situations

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## How much does the following bother you? (fraternity)

Noticing an intoxicated chapter member harassing or bothering someone

	Perception	Reality
Not at all	7.7%	11.5%
Somewhat	50.0%	11.5%
Very much	38.5%	73.1%

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## What I want from my sorority sisters...

- 100% of my sisters said they want sisters to...
  - Step in when I'm drinking to the point of harming myself
  - Step in if I'm drinking to the point of putting the health & safety of others in jeopardy
  - Step in if I'm intoxicated and embarrassing the chapter

*Think of some parallel questions for elder abuse*

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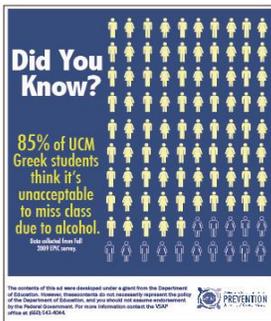
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### Citation Information

The material in this presentation is from:

“RESPONSE ABILITY: The Complete Guide to Bystander Behavior” available from [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com)

“A Grassroots Guide to Fostering Healthy Norms to Reduce Violence in Our Communities: A Social Norms Toolkit” available from [www.alanberkowitz.com](http://www.alanberkowitz.com)

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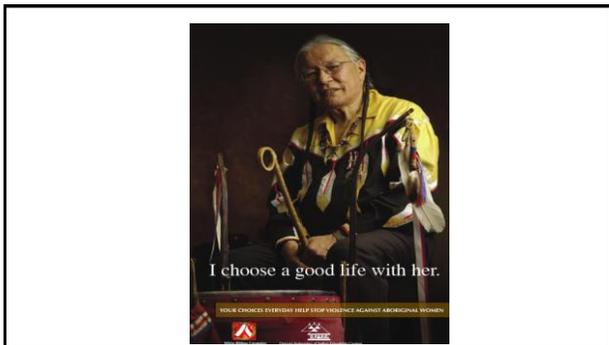
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You can be “in tune” with the drumbeat of life.

Thank you for your compassion and caring and willingness to make a difference

You have personal “you power” because of who you are and want to be

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### Contact Information

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