AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Bystander Intervention Tip Sheet

WHAT IS A BYSTANDER AND UPSTANDER?

When someone witnesses and ignores a prejudiced attack, whether through choice or ignorance of the discriminatory nature of the situation, they can appear to be condoning or reinforcing the offender's behavior and add to the alienation of the targeted individual. These individuals are referred to as "bystanders". Violence and aggression, whether macro or micro, perpetuate discrimination based on any characteristic, including age, ethnicity, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, some combination of these or something else. By finding ways to inform and encourage individuals to respond to prejudiced behavior and speak out against discriminatory words or actions in the moment they occur, we can motivate a society of upstanders who will make anti-discriminatory behavior the social norm, and create a safer, more inclusive society.

Bystanding

A bystander is an individual who observes or witnesses a situation of discrimination or violence committed by a perpetrator towards a victim, and has the **opportunity** to either condone, intervene, or do nothing (Rodenhizer-Stämpfli et al., 2018; Barnyard, 2011, as cited in Henson et al., 2020).

Upstanding

An upstander is a bystander who recognizes acts or utterances of injustice and **takes a stand** by interrupting and challenging situations that normalize discrimination and potential violence. (Nelson et al., 2011; Grantham, 2011; Parrott et al., 2020).

The difference between bystander intervention and the "Bystander Effect"

Bystander intervention is not the same as "The Bystander Effect." Bystander intervention involves a bystander becoming an upstander in discriminatory/emergency situations. The "Bystander Effect" refers to the psychological phenomenon where individuals are less likely to help or intervene due to the ambiguity of the situation, the inhibiting presence of multiple bystanders (diffusion of responsibility), and the social influence of other people's inaction (Henson et al., 2020; Madden & Loh, 2020; Jenkins & Nickerson, 2019; Bystander, 2006).

EXAMPLES OF SITUATIONS WHERE YOU MAY BE A BYSTANDER

- An acquaintance of yours makes a racially biased joke in a private context
- You overhear an individual making a sexist remark about a coworker
- You witness a queer student being bullied by another student
- You observe a marginalized individual experiencing microaggressions from another individual

PROMOTERS AND BARRIERS TO UPSTANDING

Promoters of upstanding

To promote the change from bystander to upstander, we need to motivate and educate bystanders to give them the ability and confidence to confront racism and racially-motivated violence. Promoters include:

- Knowledge and awareness of discrimination and the harm it can cause (Nelson et al., 2011)

- An individual's confidence and intent to successfully intervene in a discriminatory situation, also known as Bystander Self-Efficacy (Parrott et al., 2020; Muja et al., 2021).

- Members of non-marginalized groups confronting perpetrators of discrimination (Gulker et al., 2013)

- Affective empathy, which involves empathetic concern and sharing another individual's feelings or emotions. (Menolascino & Jenkins, 2018)

- Assertiveness (Jenkins & Nickerson, 2019)

- Desire to educate perpetrator(s) (Nelson et al., 2011)

- Social norms that do not tolerate racism (Nelson et al., 2011)

- Bystander intervention education, training, and programming (Gabriella et al., 2021; McMahon et al., 2021)

Barriers to upstanding

Many of us can identify hesitation that comes when observing an aggressive or violent situation. Identifying those barriers to upstanding is one of the first steps to progress from moving to being a bystander to an upstander. Barriers include:

- Social and economic costs of failing to be an upstander (Kawakami et al., 2019)

- Confronters from marginalized groups not being taken seriously or being seen as complainers (Kawakami et al., 2019; Gulker et al., 2013)

- Not knowing or interpreting a situation as discriminatory or biased (Kawakami et al., 2019)

- Not having social relations with victims of discrimination or prejudice (Liebst, 2019)

- Fear of retribution (Haynes-Baratz, 2021)

- Status or perceived power of the perpetrator (Haynes-Baratz, 2021)

- Social norms that are tolerant of discrimination or marginalization (Nelson et al., 2011)

- Conflict-avoidance (Nelson et al., 2011)

- Perceiving one's actions or knowledge to be inefficient to intervene (Nelson et al., 2011)

ACTION STEPS

Once people recognize their own power to become active in an bystander situation, they can take action to mitigate the effects of the situation. Proactive behavior is key in becoming an upstander. Proactive options can occur at several different levels and include:

INTERPERSONAL LEVEL

Upstanding in 5 Steps (Rodenhizer-Stämpfli et al., 2018; Nelson et al., 2011)

1. Notice a discriminatory/emergency situation and interpret it

2. Evaluate the incident's problematic nature and decide if it requires intervention

3. Assume responsibility for intervening

4. Know and decide how to approach the situation

5. Choose to take action

Hollabacks!'s 5 D's to Bystander Intervention: (Hollaback!, 2017)

1. **Distract**: Indirectly diffuse the situation by interrupting the harasser and the target (e.g. commotion, small talk, etc.)

2. **Delegate:** Ask a third party for assistance in intervening, preferably an individual in a position of authority

3. **Document:** If it is safe to do so and someone is already helping the target, write notes or take a video of the discriminatory situation (permission to share the situation belongs to the target)

4. **Delay:** Check in with the person who was discriminated/harassed (e.g. support, offer assistance, etc.)

5. **Direct:** If everyone is physically safe, speak firmly and clearly against the harassment/discrimination taking place (prioritize assisting the target over debating the harasser)

COMMUNAL LEVEL

- Public awareness campaigns that bring light to the gravity of marginalization and promote upstanding, even against what may seem to feel like (but are not) small offenses such as discriminatory jokes and stereotypes (VicHealth, 2010).

- Community leaders, role models, and peers taking on pro-social, helping behaviors can have influential effects by changing social norms towards bystander intervention (VicHealth, 2010).

- Anti-bias campaigns that utilize messages which emphasize both our similarities and differences (VicHealth, 2010).

INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

- When instances of bias and discrimination occur, individuals look to their leaders or managers first to address the issue. For this reason, these individuals need to be prepared to step up in these moments (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2019).

- Offering training and programming that educates employees on how to facilitate an inclusive, non-discriminatory work environment (VicHealth, 2010).

- Having a work climate that promotes respect, listening, and appropriate behavior (Haynes-Baratz, 2021)

- Upstander behavior from school administrators and teachers against school bullying is significantly associated with direct intervention, peer response, and self-efficacy (Farley, 2018).

MACRO LEVEL

- Educating people on the formation and potential harm of structural biases may contribute to bystander/ally action (Brown et al., 2021)

- Changing the perception of non-marginalized individuals that intention outweighs impact in qualifying a situation as discriminatory/prejudiced (Brown et al., 2021)

- Fostering a willingness to confront perpetrators that are strangers, just like the desire to confront perpetrators that are friends (Brown et al., 2021)

RESOURCES

- **APA's #Equity Flattens The Curve (EFTC)**

- **Victorian Health Promotion Foundation: Review of bystander approaches in support of preventing race-based discrimination**

- **UMass Lowell: Bystander Training**

- **Hollaback! Bystander Intervention Training**

- **CDC: Social-Ecological Model: A Framework for Prevention**

- **Asian Americans Advancing Justice - LA: Bystander Intervention Trainings**

- **Speak Up! 2021: Responding to everyday bigotry**

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