

Bystander Anti-Racism

Racism affects sexual assault survivors and individuals working in the advocacy field, and also creates an oppressive environment that contributes to sexual violence. Nelson, Dunn, and Paradies (2011) conducted an extensive review of research on bystander anti-racism, defined by them as:

Action taken by a person or persons (not directly involved as a target or perpetrator) to speak out about or to seek to engage others in responding (either directly or indirectly, immediately or at a later time) against interpersonal or systemic racism (p. 265).

When bystanders confront racism, they hope to prevent further harm, show solidarity with the target of the racist speech or behavior, and/or change social norms to make racism less acceptable.

Considering the results of 45 articles about this type of intervention, Nell, Dunn, and Paradies found certain themes in common:

- Individuals often thought about doing or saying something when they observed racist behavior, but frequently did not act.
- Children engage in bystander actions at somewhat lower rates than adults.
- Research has not yet conclusively shown that bystander intervention reduces the negative effects of racism for targets, nor has it demonstrated positive effects on perpetrators, although both results are suggested by the evidence.
- Bystanders who do intervene generally feel a sense of personal satisfaction.
- People tend to speak up more when they believe others feel as they do.
- White Americans tended to provide less help to Black Americans than to individuals of their own race, sometimes rationalizing that the situation was less serious for Black victims in emergency situations.
- Obstacles to bystander anti-racism include fears about personal safety, the belief that intervention would not be effective, and difficulty knowing what to do and what to say.
- A major barrier to intervention is concern about how speaking up will affect relationships.

The authors of this review article looked at what makes bystander anti-racism effective. They found that "The most effective bystander action is that which communicates a message of disapproval or discomfort without damaging interpersonal relations" (p.

272). They presented modifications to Ashburn-Nardo, Morris, and Goodwin's (2008) Confronting Prejudiced Responses (CPR) model, which offers strategies for anti-racist action. Nelson, Dunn, and Paradies revised this model to produce five effective steps, summarized here:

1. Training should raise awareness of what racism is, and what inclusive behavior looks like.
2. Leaders and authority figures need to send a clear message that any type of racism, at any level, is unacceptable (jokes included).
3. Bystanders should intervene, report, or challenge perpetrators in some other way.
4. Context is critical: leadership and social norms should support bystander action.
5. People need to know how to confront or intervene, with special attention to the context of the racist behavior.

The authors discuss whether nonconfrontational tactics or confrontation are more effective, and conclude that there may be a place for both approaches.

Increasing the frequency and effectiveness of bystander anti-racism may help advance the anti-sexual violence field in a number of ways. Bystander anti-racism can be integrated into anti-bullying and other awareness programming. Advocates can support survivors who are experiencing racism; they can help to create fairness in the workplace; they can use their skills to intervene in interpersonal or systemic racism in the systems with which survivors interact; and they can provide leadership and support social norms that encourage social justice within their communities.

Resources Mentioned by Nelson, Dunn, & Paradies

- The [Anti-discrimination Response Training \(A.R.T.\) Program](#) – provides skill development and suggested responses to racist speech and behavior
- [Speak Up: Responding to Everyday Bigotry](#) – a handbook from the Southern Poverty Law Center that is notable for “attention paid to contexts and specific situations”

References

Nelson, J.K., Dunn, K.M., & Paradies, Y. (2011). Bystander anti-racism: A review of the literature. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, 11(1), 263-284.

Ashburn-Nardo, L., Morris, K., & Goodwin, S. (2008). The Confronting Prejudiced Responses (CPR) Model: Applying CPR in organizations. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 7(3), 332-342.