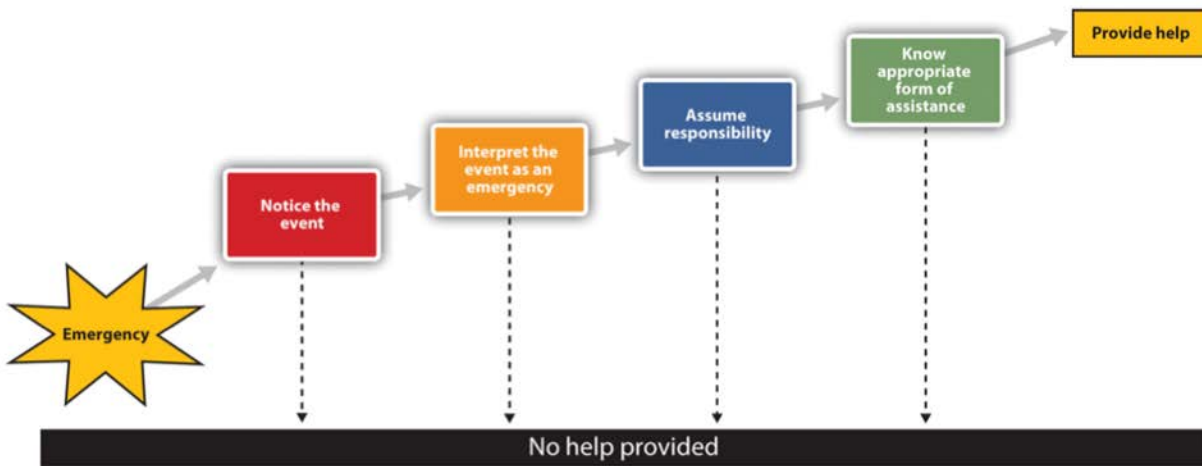


Expanding on Bystander Intervention: Addressing the Whole Continuum

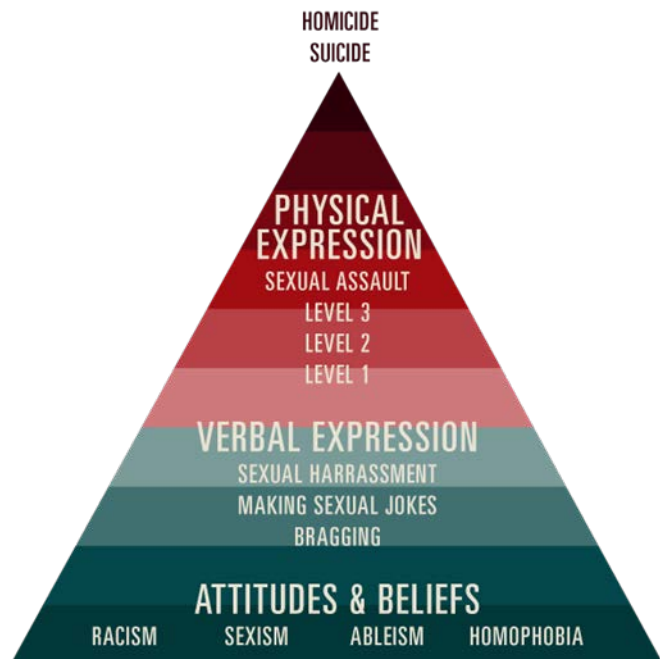
In the field of sexual violence prevention, bystander intervention is a strategy that has gained increased popularity over the years. We've seen it become the go-to strategy for many colleges and universities as they implement bystander intervention based programs on their campuses. Many of these efforts, but not all, focus on situations where alcohol and other drugs are present and being used to facilitate a sexual assault. In the article titled [*When Can I Help? A Conceptual Framework for the Prevention of Sexual Violence Through Bystander Intervention*](#), researchers Sarah McMahon and Victoria L. Banyard tell us that while these situations are prevalent and bystander intervention is a key strategy in interrupting them, the bystander concept is also effective in many other situations.

The Research

Bystander intervention is a concept that was popularized by social psychologists Bibb Latane and John Darley after the high profile murder of Kitty Genovese in 1964. After it was reported that up to 37 people witnessed the murder and did not intervene or call for help, researchers began looking into what factors affected the likelihood that someone will intervene in an emergency situation. Latane and Darley developed a model of helping, illustrated below, which details the stages one goes through when noticing an emergency and making a decision to intervene.



Those familiar with bystander intervention efforts in the field of sexual violence will see many parallels between this model and many of the bystander intervention programs being implemented on college campuses. When applied to emergency, high risk situations, the model is very applicable. However, when applied to sexual violence, the model does not address low-risk behaviors that occur at the bottom of the continuum of sexual violence, pictured.



http://ccasayourworld.com/get_the_facts/violence_pyramid/

High-Risk

“High-risk bystander opportunities can be defined as situations immediately preceding a sexual assault where the victim is facing an imminent risk of harm.” (Banyard, McMahon 2011)

Low-Risk

“Another type of reactive bystander opportunities can be labeled low risk, which can be defined as situations in which negative attitudes toward women and/or sexual violence are expressed, but do not pose immediate or high risk of harm to potential victims of sexual assault.” (Banyard, McMahon 2011)

There are several causes of sexual violence. Some are related to individual pathology of offenders, but most are related to social norms and a culture that supports, condones, and ignores sexually violent messages and/or behavior. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has identified a number of risk factors for sexual violence perpetration, including hyper-masculinity, adherence to traditional gender role norms, hostility towards women, and association with sexually aggressive, hyper-masculine, and delinquent peers.

In their article, Banyard and McMahon state, "...the concept of racial microaggressions is a useful tool for understanding the definition and potential harm of 'low-risk' everyday acts that support sexism and violence against women. Applied to the field of sexual violence, microaggressions may be defined as subtle, intentional, or unintentional acts that communicate hostile, derogatory, or sexualizing insults toward women generally and rape survivors specifically. Examples of this type of behavior include, but are not limited to: using sexist language and jokes, talking about women as sexual objects, displaying pornographic images of women, ranking women's physical appearances, joking about the use of sexual aggression, using degrading language to describe rape survivors or using rape jokes, displaying sexual images of women on social networking sites, and making harassing comments or gestures."

Some bystander intervention programs provide scenarios where people have an opportunity to interrupt some of these behaviors, (i.e., interrupting a sexist comment or joke) but many focus more on high-risk situations. Banyard and McMahon explain that while intervention in high-risk situations immediately prior to a potential assault is critically important, the chance of someone encountering them may be low. They add that there are cultures or contexts where high-risk situations may be more prevalent, and that bystander education can be tailored to address this. Most groups, however, will have far more opportunities to intervene in low-risk behaviors.

In order for us to move our prevention efforts further upstream, it is vital that we include low-risk situations as a central part of bystander intervention efforts. While it is important that high-risk acts of sexual violence are interrupted, it is also important that bystanders are equipped with the skills to intervene when the attitudes and beliefs that underlie acts of sexual violence are observed.

For more information on interrupting low-risk acts of sexual violence, check out this article titled [*"10 Everyday Sexisms and What Do You Do About Them."*](#)

References

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