

# Service Learning as Social Justice Activism: Students Help a Campus Shift to Bystander Awareness

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*While service learning can be compatible with feminist objectives, if the service does not contribute to structural change or help students understand their role in facilitating change, it can replicate patriarchal goals and run counter to feminism (Ludlow). In this article, we show the way we utilized a feminist lens when designing and implementing a service learning project designed to tackle the problem of dating violence on our campus community. We argue that the feminist lens enhanced student learning and ensured the students make a more lasting and meaningful contribution to a community.*

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Scholars on service learning have demonstrated that it has many benefits. They argue that service learning helps students build empathy for others (Bowdon, Pigg and Pompos Mansfield 57) and enables students to better understand communities and develop practical work experience (Deans 1). It can also advance the feminist pedagogical principle of decentering the hierarchal relationship between the teacher as expert and student as passive recipient of knowledge by

providing a forum of experiential learning (Novek 234). Service learning empowers students to play an active role in their own learning, making connections between classroom theory and the practice of community service.

The danger in service learning is that it becomes a paternalistic project whereby the student exudes benevolence while helping the unfortunate, downtrodden, and, by implication, lesser beings. Bickford and Reynolds argue that service is “too often infused with a volunteer ethos, a philanthropic or charitable viewpoint that ignores the structural reasons to help others” (230). A dichotomy is created between the givers and receivers of service that views the service providers as superior and the recipients as having some type of deficit. Rather than collaboratively working to understand the causes of a social problem and working to transform underlying conditions, the recipients of the aid must simply be grateful for the personal sacrifices of their benefactor. They have little or no voice or personal agency. Such a model reinforces pre-existing power hierarchies because the interventions are not designed to change social structures.

Service can reinforce such hierarchies through replicating destructive stereotypes. Gent, for example, writes on the ways service learning interventions to help disabled children, such as reading to the blind or visiting disabled individuals who lived in particular institutions actually reinforced negative images of them as childlike, “broken and in need of repair” (228) and thus individuals in need of our sympathies and condolences. Gent argues that interventions can be inappropriate because neither the designers nor the participants in such service are generally part of the community targeted (228-232). As Novek points out, the service is then designed with paternalistic biases portrayed through media rather than through a genuine understanding of the needs of the community. Such interventions can provide a feel-good experience for service-givers but may not respond to community needs ( 235).

If a feminist analysis is considered in the design, implementation, and analysis of service learning, then service learning can more effectively counter inequalities and promote social change. The insider/outsider debate within feminist research methodology can be applied to

service learning. Scholars such as Haraway and Collins emphasize the importance of the researcher recognizing one's own standpoint in relation to the subjects researched. They argue that rather than presuming neutrality, one should recognize race, class, and gender hierarchies between researcher and subject, thus developing a more caring and empathetic approach (Haraway; Collins). Through recognizing our own "situated knowledges" (Haraway 575), we can more fully understand the structures we want to change. Rather than feeling sorry for the participant, we should strive to empathize, understand, and remain in constant dialogue.

This can be applied to service learning. Through recognizing the agency and standpoint of the service recipients as well as the service providers, then we can partner with each other to facilitate change and eliminate the divide between provider and recipient. Moreover, this theory allows us to recognize that we can conduct service in our own communities where we may be best placed to identify social problems and devise strategies to serve our community. We can then understand that service to our own community can involve challenging power inequalities (Mohanty; Sandoval), changing oppressive attitudes and behaviors, and facilitating social change (Reinharz; Naples).

In this article, we focus on the methodology of Dionne's Project for Safe Relationships, which uses bystander awareness strategies in an undergraduate service learning context to actively engage the community in intervention in potentially violent dating situations among college students. We intend it as a partial response to the call for the study of service learning as a remedy to some of the systemic injustices of higher education (Verjee). It bases its methodology upon three important premises. First, through combining classroom study with practical campus activism, students can develop a more in depth understanding of a social problem and recognize their agency in creating social change, moving closer to answers for the harder question, "Why are conditions this way?" rather than the easier and more patronizing "How can we help these people?" (Bickford and Reynolds 231). Second, intervention in sexual victimization must be preventative and must challenge the culture that permits such violence to occur. Third, providing even minimal education and

training in bystander awareness to a small group of students can shift an entire campus culture and lay the groundwork for healthy relationships and community engagement for their entire lives.

In the following pages, we argue that engagement of student researchers in service to the university as part of a feminist pedagogy, with direct training of a relatively small group of students in bystander awareness strategies, raises individual student awareness, including an increase in their willingness to intervene on the behalf of others—friends, acquaintances, even strangers. Moreover, this study also shows that engaging even a small proportion of the student body can impact a larger number of students on campus, even if they themselves don't conduct research, attend the service course, or participate in the training. In this way, bystander intervention service learning education can accomplish a cultural shift in favor of greater social justice and community responsibility for everyone's safety.

In this article, we first discuss why it is important to apply the bystander awareness approach as an alternative to traditional interventions to violence against women (VAW). We then describe the way we utilized the classroom to teach students theory about dating violence, bystander awareness and research methods, and to develop a practical campus interventions service learning pedagogy. Next we discuss the significance of the comparative study we conducted of two groups of students, one in their first year and the other in their second year of study at the university that measured their bystander efficacy. Finally, we recommend ways future research can further enhance campus interventions on social problems through bystander awareness.

## **WHERE WE STARTED—AN EFFORT THAT FELL SHORT**

We focused on the topic of campus sexual violence because a tragedy on our small liberal arts campus in Southwestern Pennsylvania called students and faculty to action. A student named Dionne experienced abuse in an intimate partner relationship and was ultimately murdered. She did everything a woman's shelter would advise—she left him and secured a Protection from Abuse Order. One night, however, he gained entry to her house, argued with her, and strangled her. As the horror of her situation permeated the campus, students, faculty, and



*Dionne Scott-White*

staff, even many of her family members, met and asked questions. Why did this happen, even though she had a Protection from Abuse Order? Why didn't most of us know she lived with abuse and that her life was in danger? If Dionne experienced such violence, who else among us was currently in danger? What could we do to prevent this from happening again?

We formed a campus organization called Dionne's Project for Safe Relationships to respond and quickly settled on the need for more campus education on the topic when we realized our situation was sadly, not unique. National Centers for Disease Control data indicate one in five U.S. women and one in 71 men have been raped in their lifetimes, more than half by an intimate partner or acquaintance (Black, Basile, Breiding, Smith, Walters, Merrick, Chen and Stevens 1-2), while the U.S. Department of Justice cites rates of intimate partner violence among college students ranging from 10% to 50%

(Kaukinen). Studies have repeatedly shown high rates of rape or attempted rape among college students since they entered college (Koss, Gidycz and Wisniewski), amounting to a crisis “that should concern campus officials and citizens generally”(Fisher, Daigle and Cullen 70).

Over time, as we collected information and conducted awareness events on campus, we gradually found that prevention information workshops attracted fewer and fewer participants, while student-administered surveys still showed a pervasive lack of knowledge about partner violence and support resources and a high rate of exposure to domestic and dating violence. We realized Dionne’s Project did not appear to be making meaningful changes to the students’ lives on campus. We needed to find a way to embed new cultural norms within our community before Dionne’s story was forgotten.

## **COMMON INTERVENTIONS: NOT CHALLENGING VIOLENCE**

The first step in developing a strategy to address dating violence on campus was to study the strengths and weaknesses of previous strategies. To prepare for their eventual service, students observed that most efforts at prevention involved self-defense courses or stranger-danger awareness. Such techniques that teach women and other potential violence victims to alter their behavior to avoid sexual assault (monitor drinks at parties to avoid drugs, drink responsibly, travel in pairs, avoid dark streets, dress modestly, don’t ride or go home with strangers) ultimately blame the victim for being victimized rather than hold the perpetrator accountable, according to some critics like Schwartz, DeKeseredy, Tait and Alvi (Fisher, Daigle and Cullen 185). In addition, “stranger danger” workshops ignore the fact that the majority of sexual assailants are people known to the victim in dating violence or domestic assault (Warshaw). Such training makes the students feel solely responsible for any negative consequences when they find themselves in a number of vulnerable situations. As a result, when students are victimized, they may cope psychologically by not even recognizing or acknowledging their sexual victimization, which may have an impact on their recovery and vulnerability to revictimization (Fisher, Cullen and Turner 135-139).

By contrast, the perpetrators have seldom received prior instruction that controlling their behavior is their responsibility or that coercing women into sexual relations is wrong. In fact, society often reinforces the notion that males can prove their masculinity through behaviors that control, objectify, and degrade women. Moreover, while new interventions to counsel perpetrators are a positive step in removing the blame from the victim, they create two additional problems. Since they work with individuals who have already offended, they only try to prevent an offender from re-offending rather than prevent individuals from perpetrating violence in the first place. Targeting convicted offenders does not work to prevent violence, or, as Walker notes, address the deficiencies in society that lead to gender violence (19). In addition, when courts sentence convicted offenders to counseling rather than to jail (where they could also be required to have counseling), they endanger the safety of women who need to escape their perpetrators. Moreover, studies show that perpetrators who receive mandated counseling are much less likely to change attitudes and behavior than those who voluntarily participate in such programs (Bancroft). Through this study, students and teachers hypothesized that if the work on changing attitudes and behaviors were utilized in prevention work, then they could transform social norms.

## **THE BYSTANDER AWARENESS ALTERNATIVE**

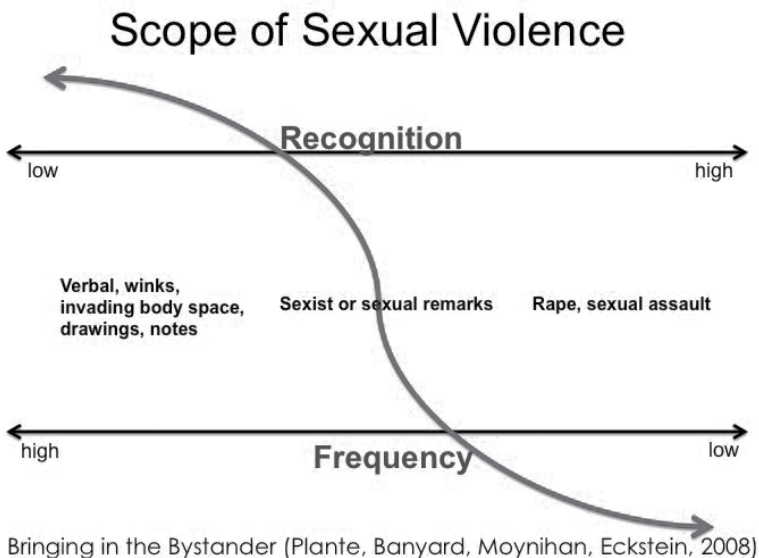
Since Dionne's experience was proof that our students could and do experience violence and that traditional approaches may not work, we were interested in finding ways to ensure that members of our campus community knew about violence against women and ways to prevent Dionne's tragedy from happening again.

We examined programs, such as Men Stopping Violence, Men Can Stop Rape, and The Mentors in Violence Prevention Program that challenge the campus culture itself by encouraging males to influence their peers to act safely and responsibly, sometimes even employing bystander intervention strategies. They use positive peer pressure because "there is a recognition that motivated offenders are less likely to break the law when others are around to discourage them from doing so" (Fisher, Daigle and Cullen 191). We valued the way these programs worked to change attitudes that lead to dating violence.

With the help of our partnering community victim services agency, we determined that our intervention should challenge the perception that victims are exclusively responsible for their own safety.

In bystander approaches specifically, students, both male and female, learn to intervene on behalf of their friends and even strangers to interrupt behavior that is dangerous or puts them at greater risk. Such approaches motivate the community as a whole to act against prospective violence and begin to change the cultural taboos against talking about or acknowledging domestic and other gender violence.

Bystander awareness is based on increasing a community's efficacy and agency in challenging comments and behaviors that promote such violence. Bystander programs, such as those developed by Prevention Innovations at the University of New Hampshire, educate students in ways to challenge a range of gender violence incidents from sexist jokes to party behavior that is verbally or physically abusive or careless of another's safety. Researchers have established an inverse relationship between bystanders' recognition of the scope of sexual violence and the frequency of the offenses that points to the value of early intervention. The chart below illustrates that bystanders





are more likely to recognize more violent offenses that happen with less frequency (rape, sexual assault) and less likely to recognize sexist jokes, other verbal offenses, touching and innuendo as a climate's precursors to greater gender-based violence (Plante, Banyard, Moynihan and Eckstein).

Bystander training raises awareness of and ability to recognize sexual violence at the lower levels of violence that occur at higher frequency. This early recognition increases the potential and frequency of intervention, thus shifting the climate and the culture's tolerance of gender violence overall. Such bystander awareness training has been shown to be a key intervention on campus sexual and domestic violence, because it challenges cultural norms embedded within the community that accept gender violence and call upon community members to act (Fabiano, Perkins, Berkowitz, Linkenbach and Stark).

## **THE PEDAGOGY**

Dionne's Project encompasses both classroom strategies and co-curricular activities in its pedagogy. Having started as an extra-curricular grief support group, the project evolved into a student club but then eventually suffered from low participation on a campus of predominantly non-traditional students with other time-intensive employment and family responsibilities. At the same time, after completing a project that conducted a peer survey of student experience with domestic and partner violence, students in one of the English courses perceived the need for greater campus awareness and strategies to support survivors of partner violence, although they knew from first-hand experience that students often did not have the extra-curricular time to participate. They creatively proposed a win-win solution: that we adopt Dionne's Project as a service learning curriculum across curricula and disciplines, what Loyens and Rikers label as a problem-based, project-based or inquiry-based curriculum (365-368), so that they could consistently use course time to learn and contribute to its research and dissemination while receiving academic credit in a variety of disciplines. To that end, some instructors chose to incorporate gender and partner violence information and activities into professional writing, communication, sociology, and women's studies courses.

We positioned the courses as service learning courses, a core curriculum requirement on our campus, making it attractive to students both as a topic and as a way to meet graduation requirements. As defined by Thomas Jeavons, service learning is “a form of active pedagogy that involves students in activities that both provide service to a community and engage students in an experience where they acquire knowledge, skills, or perspectives that broaden and deepen their understanding of a particular concept or subject matter” (Julier 134). Service learning on our campus is framed, not as volunteer work or charity but as a project or in this case, as social change on the continuum of service (Morton 21). This model is “theoretically about empowerment of the systematically disenfranchised,” (Morton 23), i.e. the students, who are the target focus of the campus enact the change we wish to see. From this world view, change “comes about when otherwise ordinary people find ways to bring their values, their actions and their world into closer alignment with each other” (Morton 28).

At our school, students in courses in Professional Writing, Sociology, Women’s Studies, and Communication conducted additional surveys, designed web sites and marketing plans, rolled out a social norms campaign, wrote newspaper articles, conducted an environmental scan, wrote a strategic plan, presented at campus events and even a state English conference, and organized peer workshops, all eventually focusing on bystander intervention efficacy, often for service learning credit in designated courses.

Thus, their service is positioned as a win-win for both the student and the “client;” the student “wins” new learning while the clients “win” tangible assistance in advancing their goals. It is not the students “doing” service “to” the community client, a critique of some service learning projects; instead it assiduously avoids “the tendency toward condescension, patronizing, or self-serving tenor that so often accompanies ‘charity’ work” (Julier 135). Structuring the project to meet a perceived or expressed community need, faculty and students deliberately reflect on the audience (a public rhetoric term) or client (a social service and/or business term) and engage in critical analysis of the issues surrounding that need in order to self-consciously enact and contribute to change towards social justice. In the case of this service learning experience to reduce intimate partner and dating

violence, the “client” was the campus community itself—students, faculty, and staff—who needed to better understand the problem of intimate partner and dating violence and their potential role in changing the social norms on our campus and in their families, neighborhoods and workplaces. Students were working to create change in and among us.

## **THE STUDY**

The motivation for this study was to begin to document the effects of several activities on our university’s campus in a multi-pronged feminist approach to reducing gender violence, focusing primarily on bystander awareness: drug and alcohol orientation for first-year students; some curriculum integration of Dionne’s Project to provide information and advocacy skills to sophomores, juniors, and seniors; at least one campus event annually to raise awareness of gender violence issues and/or bystander strategies; and annual student bystander efficacy surveys that assess their willingness to engage in bystander intervention or, in other cases, their actual intervention behavior.

The study was conducted as part of our university’s efforts to improve bystander efficacy. Researchers administered surveys to two consecutive freshman classes as they entered our university. Researchers also administered the same survey the second year to four sophomore classes. Throughout the year between the first and second survey, the students had opportunities to participate in Bystander Awareness Training through a local rape crisis center. They also were able to participate in other activities associated with Dionne’s Project for Safe Relationships. Moreover, they may have taken English, Sociology, or Women’s Studies classes with faculty who had integrated study on gender violence and bystander awareness into their curriculum. Hence, sophomores being surveyed had some opportunity for exposure regarding bystander awareness during their freshman year. Although the University’s campus is small, one cannot expect that all of the sophomores surveyed, though, had the same degree of training or come to the same level of awareness as others. However, due to the small nature of the campus, many students who did not directly participate in events had opportunities to talk about the issue with those who did participate.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research compares efficacy of first-year college students (that is, one's capacity to intervene as bystanders to comments around dating violence and incidents of dating violence) with agency of sophomores (that is, the extent to which individuals actually intervened). First-year students completed the survey during orientation, so they had no training on bystander awareness and had no college experience yet. Sophomores may or may not have completed the training, heard of Dionne's Project, or participated in a class that discussed gender violence and bystander awareness or participated in a Dionne's Project event, but as mentioned earlier, the campus is small and active. Hence, the probability that sophomores would have heightened awareness of bystander intervention on this campus is fairly high. So, even though this research cannot make a direct correlation between attending training and students' ability to intervene, the researchers see the climate of bystander awareness as one factor that may improve students' ability to intervene because of the established importance of campus climate. As Carr argues in a report for the American College Health Association: "Student behavior is greatly determined by prevailing cultural and social norms governing sexual attitudes and behaviors in society" (American College Health Association 16).

As indicated earlier, due to the prevalence of campus violence, many of these students would have had the opportunity to intervene in some aspect of dating violence. Surveys asked whether sophomores intervened but did not inquire about whether they had the opportunity to intervene and whether they acted on that opportunity. Future research should ask students if the perception of an opportunity to intervene exists and if they acted or did not act upon that opportunity. We acknowledge that students may have had an opportunity to intervene but may not have recognized it as such.

Our survey consisted of the questions listed below. The first survey, given to freshman before any campus intervention, asked them to rate their confidence (on a 10-point scale) that they could perform any of the listed interventions. The second survey, reported by sophomores after a year of campus-wide activities regarding bystander awareness, asked if the participant had done any of the following:

1. Expressed my discomfort when someone made a joke about a woman's body.
2. Expressed my discomfort when someone said that rape victims are to blame for being raped.
3. Called for help (i.e. call 911) when I heard someone in my dorm or apartment yelling "help."
4. Talked to a friend who I suspected was in an abusive relationship.
5. Got help and resources for a friend who told me s/he had been raped.
6. Asked a stranger who looked very upset at a party if s/he was ok or needed help.
7. Asked a friend if s/he need to be walked home from a party.
8. Asked a stranger if s/he need to be walked home from a party.
9. Criticized a friend who told me that s/he had sex with someone who was passed out or who didn't give consent.
10. Did something to help a very drunk person who was being brought upstairs to a bedroom by a group of people at a party.
11. Did something when I saw a woman surrounded by a group of men at a party who looked very uncomfortable.
12. Got help if I heard of an abusive relationship in my dorm or apartment.
13. Told an RA or other campus authority about information I had that might have helped in a sexual assault case even if pressured by my peers to stay silent.
14. Spoke up to someone who was making excuses for forcing someone to have sex with him/her.
15. Spoke up to someone who was making excuses for having sex with someone who was unable to give full consent.
16. Spoke up in class when a professor provided misinformation about sexual assault.
17. Did something to help a very drunk person who was being brought upstairs to a bedroom by a group of people at a party.
18. Did something when I saw a woman surrounded by a group of men at a party who looked very uncomfortable
19. Did something when I saw a woman surrounded by a group of men at a party who looked very uncomfortable.
20. Got help if I heard of an abusive relationship in my dorm or apartment.

21. Told an RA or other campus authority about information I had that might have helped in a sexual assault case even if pressured by my peers to stay silent.
22. Spoke up to someone who was making excuses for forcing someone to have sex with him/her
23. Spoke up to someone who was making excuses for having sex with someone who was unable to give full consent.
24. Spoke up to someone who was making excuses for using physical force in a relationship
25. Spoke up to someone who was calling a partner names or swearing at him/her

After surveys were completed, we tabulated the results and grouped the responses based on the type of issue they approach. This was to determine the degree of efficacy of the first-years and the degree of agency of the sophomores. Categories included the following: help a friend, help a stranger, confront a perpetrator, and challenge authority.

## THE FINDINGS

The following table illustrates the findings. Results for first-years show the degree to which first-years hypothesized that they would act. They measure efficacy, that is, the extent to which they believed they should act and felt comfortable acting. Results for second-years illustrate the degree to which this population exercised agency, that is, the degree to which students acted.

Question	First Year Results Degree of Efficacy	Second Year Results Degree of Agency
Q1 Spoke up—sexist joke	69%	64%
Q2 Spoke up—victim-blaming	97%	74%
Q3 Called 911 for stranger	82%	18%
Q4 Talked to friend	85%	53%
Q5 Got resources for friend	91%	17%

<b>Question</b>	<b>First Year Results Degree of Efficacy</b>	<b>Second Year Results Degree of Agency</b>
Q6 Asked stranger if needed help	67%	55%
Q7 Friend—Walk home	89%	77%
Q8 Stranger—Walk home	56%	20%
Q9 Spoke up to professor	66%	11%
Q10 Criticized someone for bragging about sex with someone who was passed out	82%	21%
Q11 Helped drunk person	79%	18%
Q12 Intervened if woman looked uncomfortable	80%	36%
Q13 Got help if heard abuse in dorm	75%	18%
Q14 Told RA	80%	18%
Q15 Spoke up when someone made excuses for forcing sex	84%	36%
Q16 Spoke up when someone had sex without giving full consent	85%	27%
Q17 Spoke up against physical force	87%	44%

From this data, we have extracted three major findings. First, students did, in fact, intervene as bystanders, including confronting perpetrators. Second, contrary to previous data, no significant difference existed between helping friends and helping strangers. Finally, students were less likely to act if it involved contacting authorities.

## **HIGH PREVALENCE OF INTERVENTION**

Sophomores reported significant levels of interventions. Overall, fifty to eighty-five percent of students intervened in one-third of the

scenarios outlined in the survey. The level of intervention shows that many of them encountered situations where they could intervene; that is, they witnessed episodes of dating and sexual violence highlighted in the survey. Students' agency (that is, degree to which students acted) fell below eighteen percent for only one of the questions. That question involved confronting authority, which we will discuss later.

Specifically, sophomores a) found themselves in situations where they witnessed dating violence or comments about dating violence; b) recognized these incidents as such; and c) took action to help individuals or counteract stereotypes. In survey items that involved scenarios in which the respondent reported confronting a negative social norm (victim blaming) or the perpetrator of violence against a partner (Items 2, 10, 15, 16, or 18), first-years reported high efficacy (75-87% confidence) but agency depended upon the scenario. In Item 2 (victim blaming), the reported agency (74%) was fairly close to their self-efficacy (86% confidence). In Item 18 (Spoke up to someone who was calling partner names or swearing at him/her) students reported 74% confidence and 75% agency. These two items demonstrate that students understood that it was important to intervene as freshmen and that they took the opportunity to intervene by the time they were sophomores. We hope that bystander awareness interventions taught them how to effectively intervene.

It is important to note here that we are not claiming a sole cause and effect relationship for the bystander training. Other factors could certainly account for at least some of the intervention behaviors of the sophomore students. As elucidated in the Discussion section, several improvements in program and study design could more clearly establish a causal relationship. For now, we are struck with the important difference in first-year and sophomore outcomes and believe that the data at least raises the possibility that the training and service learning activities helped create a shift in campus culture.

## **CONFRONTING PERPETRATORS**

Students challenged social norms around sexist jokes, disagreed with those who made excuses for rape and directly confronted individuals who they observed calling their partner names or swearing at their partner. Seventy-four percent of students expressed discomfort



at a sexist joke (Question 2). Fifty percent criticized someone who bragged about perpetuating a rape (Question 10). Thirty-six percent challenged someone for making excuses for rape (Question 15), and twenty-seven percent challenged someone for making excuses for coercing someone to engage in sexual activity. Seventy-four percent spoke to someone who was name-calling or swearing at the partner (Question 18). Such agency indicates that bystanders encountered situations that promoted a climate that supported sexual violence, identified such situations, and felt strongly enough to intervene, and found a way in which to intervene. This indicates that students utilized bystander awareness.

One important facet of bystander intervention is learning that the seemingly benign comments about a woman's appearance or ability are important sites of intervention, the low-level incidents described earlier that have a direct relationship to higher level violence (See Plante, et al). Often, the public lets such comments go because they pervade our society and because they do not want to make a fuss over a small issue they construe as harmless. This belief is particularly salient for college students where "fitting in" is so important. As described elsewhere in this issue, interventions challenging street harassment are raising public awareness about the prevalence and character of sexual harassment and other kinds of identity-focused public misbehavior (Hayes). But it is clear from the sophomore surveys in our project that after exposure to an environment that challenges this harmful norm, students do feel comfortable enough in their skills and/or the environment to intervene even in low-level incidents.

## **STUDENTS INTERVENED TO HELP STRANGERS**

In our previous study of the extent to which students believed they would intervene according to the bystander awareness model, we found that students believed that they would be more likely to intervene to help friends rather than strangers (Lietz, Tunney, Zamboni and Carnegie-Clarke). In our current two-year study, we found that students showed a willingness to help strangers as well as friends. For instance, eighty-five percent were willing to talk to friends to express concern about an abusive relationship, ninety percent were willing to provide helpful resources to a friend, and

eighty-eight percent were willing to walk a friend home. When asked questions involving help for strangers, students answered in the following way: seventy percent said they would be willing to help a stranger at a party who needed help, eighty percent said they would help a woman who looked uncomfortable when surrounded by men, eighty percent said they would help a drunk person who was brought upstairs at a party, and fifty-seven percent said they would walk a stranger home. Perhaps the closing gap between one's willingness to help friends and strangers, indicates a shift in the university culture towards intervening to help both populations and that service learning, trainings, and student research to promote bystander awareness, are perhaps actually producing a change in attitudes at the university.

Moreover, data indicates that students actually helped both friends and strangers. Specifically, seventy-seven percent walked a friend home from a party and fifty-three percent talked to a friend who they suspected was in an abusive relationship. However, only sixteen percent helped a friend obtain help and outside resources, which the authors later discuss in the section about getting help from authority figures. And contrary to previous predictions, sophomore students did help strangers. Fifty-five percent asked a stranger if they were ok or needed help, forty-six percent did something to help a very drunk person brought upstairs at a party, and seventy-four percent spoke up to someone who was calling the partner names. These findings reveal that an alarming percentage of students had the opportunity to intervene in situations of dating violence and that they chose not to take action. Students felt equipped to identify and act on gender violence. In addition, the fact that so many students encountered such scenarios, shows that bystander intervention is relevant to their lives.

## **DID NOT CHALLENGE AUTHORITY OR CONTACT AUTHORITIES**

Another key finding is that students expressed high efficacy as first-year students but low agency as sophomores around calling 911 or even seeking help from a Residential Advisor. While eighty-two percent believed they would call 911, only eighteen percent of students did call 911. Eighty percent of students hypothesized they would get help from a Residential Advisor, but only eighteen percent did.

Finally, while seventy-five percent of students believed they would get outside help if they heard an abusive incident in their dorm or apartment, only eighteen percent did. Since we know students talked to friends whom they have suspected were in abusive relationships, helped people get home safely when in a dangerous situation, and observed women being taken advantage of in parties, then we know that dating and sexual violence occurs in students' lives.

Why, then, are they reluctant to call 911, talk to a Resident Advisor, or connect with an organization that helps those who experience sexual violence? Perhaps students did not believe that such situations were serious enough to warrant contacting outsiders. Perhaps they felt uncomfortable bringing in third-parties. Perhaps they felt such third parties could do little to help the situation. Such findings recall other research on police negativity and stereotypical perception of sexual assault complainants who "must still battle to gain credibility in the eyes of some police investigative officers" (Jordan), resulting in a definite reluctance to go through police, courts, and others who have jurisdiction. Do students not want to put themselves through an arduous court case? Do they not trust police, courts and campus authorities to handle the matter sensitively? All of these questions and ways to overcome sexual assault stereotypes, particularly among police and other investigative authorities should be researched further.

A qualitative research project on student reluctance to bring in third-parties is necessary to determine the best way to rectify this problem. Such a study might indicate that more training of police and residential advisors is necessary, and/or that there is a greater need for universities to partner with helping organizations to make students feel more comfortable contacting them. Finally, further study might show that bystander awareness training should focus on helping students discern when a situation is serious enough to warrant contacting a third-party and understanding their options regarding receiving outside help.

Similarly, students exhibited relatively low efficacy and low agency in speaking up to authority, such as teachers in the classroom, when spreading misinformation or reinforcing stereotypes regarding

dating and sexual violence. Sixty-five percent of first-year students believed they would challenge a professor who made denigrating comments about women, which is low relative to other answers. Only eleven percent of sophomores did so, which is the lowest use of agency in the study. The fact that first-years were relatively unwilling to do this and sophomores did not do this, perhaps means that students fear reprisal from authority figures if they challenge them (such as getting a bad grade in a class if they challenge the teacher). One would like to assume that university faculty would not reinforce negative ideas about sexual and domestic violence and that sophomores did not act because they did not feel a need to, but such a hypothesis would be naïve at this stage of intervention. We had no way of knowing how often students encountered misinformation, but this data points to a perceived lack of support from faculty. We hope that eventually faculty and staff routinely receive training to follow the bystander awareness model. The ten percent of students who did speak up to authority offer a glimmer of hope that, if trainings concentrate on constructive ways of speaking up and if faculty and staff normalize the bystander awareness model, then we would see greater willingness of students to meet the high need for intervention.

## **DISCUSSION**

The study data confirms that students had/have a dismaying number of opportunities to intervene. Less clear is whether students who did not intervene either a) did not have the opportunity to intervene; b) perceived that they did not have the opportunity to intervene; c) had the opportunity to intervene but did not know how to do so; or d) had the opportunity but chose not to intervene. If students were willing to intervene but did not recognize their opportunity to do so, then students need more in-depth training that is customized to help them identify intervention opportunities. If students wanted to intervene but did not know how, then perhaps bystander trainings could include more student discussion of realistic ways to intervene. Further research could assist universities in understanding the kind of training that would be most effective in helping students recognize and intervene in dating violence.

The study indicates two possible areas of improvement needed in the university's current bystander training: 1) confronting perpetrators

and 2) contacting 911, the RA, or other help. Three questions (#10, 15, and 16) involved confronting a perpetrator making excuses for having coerced or forced sex, and responses ranged from 21-36%. While these responses indicate that nearly one quarter to one third of the student sample actually had the opportunity to confront a perpetrator and did it, they varied significantly from students' expressed willingness to do so (82-84%). Admittedly, students in the study may not have had the opportunity to confront perpetrators during the time of the study, but current training at our university also does not equip students with the skills or confidence to do so. Perhaps further bystander trainings should help students better identify opportunities to confront perpetrators and engage them in brainstorming feasible ways to do so, including consideration of how gender scripts affect dating violence scenarios. Although these students were predominantly female, it is important for all students to consider how gender norms influence their behaviors, as will be discussed in the Discussion section.

Concerning students who did not call 911, contact an RA, or get outside help for their friend, it is important to identify the specific barriers to student efficacy. Perhaps students lacked trust in these outside sources. They may have been embarrassed to raise such a sensitive subject to a friend, did not know how to access appropriate resources, or feared losing a friend if s/he found the intervention offensive. Qualitative research that provides information as to why students less often chose such interventions would be helpful in designing future trainings.

Moreover, the problem may not lie in the student's knowledge that they can access external help channels, but students' perceptions that authorities and outside agencies themselves have no efficacy. One way to increase student comfort with and confidence in external authorities, is to increase their familiarity with them by forming partnerships between campus security, residential advisors, local police, local agencies, and faculty and staff at the university. Such a partnership could include the following: 1) inviting local agencies onto campus and developing connections between students and the agencies; 2) training faculty, staff, security, residential advisors on bystander intervention and what to do if they encounter a situation

of dating or sexual violence; 3) ensuring that campus policies on addressing such violence are clear and accessible to the entire community; 4) finding ways to ensure that students do not feel as though they are “in trouble” for contacting an authority. The campus could implement and assess the student response to these strategies, perhaps even engaging the students themselves in the development of the remedial initiative.

Another improvement would be to develop a program assessment that measures the effectiveness of the training. While the longitudinal aspect of this study was an attempt to provide some evidence of campus culture change, the program itself should include an assessment of behavior change in its design in order to establish it as an effective prevention strategy according to accepted program review criteria (Lundgren and Amin). In addition, the program administrators should consider the United Nations World Health Organization “gender transformative” standard, (Barker, Ricardo and Nascimento 4) which ties program effectiveness to its direct address of gender scripts and gender roles that reinforce violence as part of masculinity and femininity norms. In its current form, the bystander training on this campus does not address the problems inherent in gender roles, binary sex categories, or institutional practices that maintain them, which could endanger the program’s long-term effectiveness.

A final aspect of the study itself that could possibly have an impact on the findings is the design of the survey itself. Some questions may have expected the bystander to intervene in unrealistic ways. For instance, rather than “walking a stranger home,” the training and survey could have focused on helping an individual find a safe way home (such as calling a friend or family member to pick her up or send her home in a taxi). This university is an urban, predominantly female institution, and many students attend off-campus parties and rely on cars or buses. Surveys and trainings should adapt to diverse university circumstances. It might also be useful to directly engage student leaders or students studying research methods in review of the questions for wording that is outdated or overly particular (such as “Call for help when someone is yelling help.”) There are many ways trainers and researchers on bystander awareness can learn

from students' answers and their input to devise more practical interventions for college students.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research showed that students utilized bystander awareness strategies and intervened in a variety of scenarios that either put someone at risk for dating violence or promoted the belief that dating violence was acceptable. Students helped both friends and strangers. They also confronted perpetrators, even though it was to a lesser degree than they hypothesized. They did not show as much agency when contacting authorities.

Further research, involving interviews and focus groups with students, could show ways to make bystander awareness even more effective. It could also show what types of bystander awareness are most relevant for a particular university campus. Eliciting from students feasible points of intervention, rather than prescribing intervention tactics, could only increase student's use of bystander awareness methodology.

Finally, we wish to share anecdotal and personal observations on the conduct of this kind of study by and for students in a service learning environment. The feminist service learning pedagogy withstands scrutiny well: student and faculty researchers, as well as other faculty and staff who participated in and received the students' findings and proposals, reflected on the value of the study from several perspectives:

1. Their increased awareness of cultural triggers and cultural tolerance of attitudes and behaviors that condone gender violence along a continuum from disrespect to assault;
2. Their own increased knowledge and efficacy in dating violence scenarios like those in the survey;
3. Their personal commitment to continued work to reduce dating violence and to support survivors in creative, non-traditional ways;

4. Their enthusiasm for continuing this work through subsequent classes to improve campus policies and increase generalized efficacy.

We hope that future research can better capture student researchers' new-found sense of advocacy and critical consciousness, as well as further document the efficacy of their peers. In this way, having mobilized many newly minted social change advocates and thus created a fitting memorial to Dionne, we look forward to tipping the scales toward a campus climate that is truly supportive of students like Dionne in healthy dating relationships and greater social justice overall.



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