it ain't just drama, mama!

A ZINE ABOUT BYSTANDER INTERVENTION

by

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Bystander intervention can be an intense subject for some people. If you’re feeling sad or scared, flip back to this page, because there’s a kitty!

I love you!

I loved your piece because you reminded me that this is political. I always forget that, or I know it for other people but not for me.

Being an assault survivor in a movement of anarchist socialists and socialists is a weird thing. For example, people gave me weird looks when I got married and took my partner’s last name, like “oh, you settle”… Sorry that’s hard to explain, but it’s to do with the last name that linked me to my abuser. I just went from one man’s name to another, and at least I love my husband. I think even in movements that call themselves radical, there are a lot of judgments about names and a total lack of understanding about what real women have to do to make it through the day.

This has also gotten really bizarre and important since I found out I’m going to be the mom of a boy. I tried to admit to some survivors that that was a weird thing for me, but they looked at me like I was being ridiculous. I think for my feminism, the challenge of raising a good man is exciting and mysterious. For a radical socialist feminist, it is, well, for me at least it’s alternately hopelessly and very scary. It’s a huge and beautiful challenge that might give us the first experience of loving a male completely and safely and unconditionally. But I doubt my own abilities and I don’t want to look at my son ever when I’m triggered or when men and make him feel like I hate him just because he has a penis. Yet I still feel like he’s one of those many shields who is so “I’m a feminist” that he never listens and can never be wrong. I’ve seen more of these, including “radical” ones, than I’ve seen decent radical men. One of the reasons I’m really into my husband is because he’s a normal, working-class gay who knows men can be messed up, not an ideal-them-that radical who wants to lecture me on being more “strong” or “feminist.”

I feel like I’ve been working so hard for years to rise above this stuff and build a life and stay alive, and that’s my weird secret, because I tell almost no one these days. But it is an important to talk about and acknowledge and to give space for dealing with it. Hopefully someday there will be a way to express this stuff out in the open.

Thank you for listening in some air.
Dear Cindy,

I wanted to write and thank you for being you - it is kick-ass and brave and one of the only things that has really shaken me up in a long time. I also wanted to give you my thoughts, reactions and story before I lost my nerve and in case any of it is useful for your site.

I haven't thought about any of this stuff consciously in a long while, have spent the last 5 years trying to stuff it under the surface. After 10 years of therapy, I can only say that something bad happened with an older male family member. In my 20s I tried to pull at those threads and unravel them, and I had terrible panic attacks and depression on and off for years. My family discounted me and I cared. Now I am living a split life, in contact with my family and pretending nothing happened while knowing inside that it did. After that early experience, I got into many other bad situations with men because I was so numb and on guard. What I could not see was that I wanted to do political organizing around women issues and never could. It's mysterious, but being with a group of women always triggers something about rape or assault will come up and I'll feel fine for a few days like I'm drowning and I can't breathe. I have responded to the whole sexual assault thing by being very tough and no-nonsense in my activism and job lives, and being with women makes me feel things, makes me feel vulnerable and when I feel crazy because I lose control. It's weird, I have wanted more than anything to be politically active with a group of women, but because I want it so much, I get intimidated when I get near real women I admire. If I don't have a sense that they've gone through something similar, I get afraid they will reject me for being damaged, and if they have been through something similar, I get afraid they'll talk about it too much and I'll get triggered. I don't know, my relationships with women are fulfilling but complicated. I think partially because my one "bad me and me" on numerous occasions and chose the abusive over me.

Being assaulted has taken a lot from me. I've triggered all the time and have 100 triggers that no one knows for keeping it together. Even at activist conferences, there are creepy men and I find myself panicking and being defensive and silent instead of speaking up and telling them to get the fuck away. I had EMDR treatment a few years ago, which really helped and has taken some of the edge off of my startle reflex.

It ain't just drama mamma!

[ ] [BYSTANDER INTERVENTION]

What does that even mean???

Bystander intervention is something that everyone should know about, because it's everyone's responsibility.

Intervening in a situation can be intimidating and difficult. It may seem hopeless or pointless, or it may even seem rude. Sometimes it's just not your business, right? Well, sometimes it should be.

People hesitate to get involved because they chalk it up to just being "drama." Even though drama is something better left in high school, it of course still happens. BUT, violent situations and sexual coercion definitely aren't just drama.

If you can see that something is wrong, make it your business. Looking out for someone else's safety is worth the moment of awkwardness or embarrassment that you might feel.
How you can tell if something is "wrong":

- If two people are together, and one person is obviously much more drunk than the other, and the more sober person is making sexual advances.
- If people are in a verbal argument that is becoming aggressive and violent.
- If people are in a physical fight.
- If someone makes a racist, homophobic, sexist or classist comment.

These are only a few examples of situations where someone should intervene.

But, trust your judgment! If you see a situation and think that something might be wrong about it, don't be afraid to do something.

Resist "bystander apathy"!

The more people that are around a violent situation, the less likely it is that someone will intervene. Resist this! Step up and do your job as someone who has recognized a violent situation!

Of course, everyone is different, and what you need in a listener most likely won't be the exact same thing that the person you're trying to support will need. But thinking about listening instead of just feeling like it's something we should inherently know how to do, is a first step.

The purpose of active listening is to help you understand what is going on inside the other person. What her feelings are, what she is experiencing, etc. Because that person is not able to always share what's going on inside, the statements she makes are sometimes coded or clouded. This means you have to decode or clear the message, and hear what she is really saying. The only way to know whether you are hearing correctly is to reflect back to the person what you are hearing from her. She will in turn let you know whether you are correct or not.

The purpose is to show that you're interested, that you've not only heard her, but that you understood (or are trying to understand) what she said. It helps check your accuracy of decoding what she is saying. It gives her a chance to breathe. It lets her know that you're actually there. It communicates acceptance. It fosters the person doing their own problem-definition and problem-solving and keeps the responsibility on her, not you.

There are common errors to avoid while active listening; these will bog it down:

- exaggerating the feeling, making it more intense than it is. Minimizing the feeling, not acknowledging it enough. Adding insight into the situation that is not there. Cutting or ignoring things she said to you. Rushing to an insight that the person may be coming to, let her come to it herself. Assuming what she said rather than decoding it. Analyzing what she says, why she feels the way she does.

Characteristics you should have or try to have:

- feeling accepting
- wanting to help
- having and wanting to take enough time
- trusting that she can solve her own problems, better than you can
- feeling reasonably separate (you can empathize with her pain, but it's not become disabled yourself.)
- avoid evaluating the person or judging or telling her what to do.
- be aware of your own feelings
A few excerpts from the
Support zine by Cindy Crabbe

Listening

Listening. It’s suppose to be this universal thing we all
know how to do, but in reality, there are a million
different ways to listen. There is listening that is silent,
like confession, and listening where you quickly come up
with your own opinions, or your own experiences, and like
a discussion, you add them in as soon as you get an
opening.

Think about listening.
Think about listening. Pay attention to the different
ways people you know listen. Figure out what it is that
makes you open up to certain people and not others — what
qualities of listening do they have? What responses do
you need to feel heard?

Intervening in a situation doesn’t necessarily
mean charging in as a “knight in shining armor”
(although that might be what you could become
for someone who is in a violent situation).
Intervention can be subtle and strategic.

Strategies of intervention:

* If someone is intoxicated, approach them
   and ask to walk them home.
   - If they agree to go, walk them back
to their room and make sure that
they are okay. If they are extremely
intoxicated or getting sick, find an
EA or RD to get help.

* If people are in a verbal argument,
   approach them and get involved in the
   conversation.
   - Ask if everything is okay. Ask them
     if they need help.
   - Offer to be a mediator.

* If people are involved in a physical
  fight:
   - If you can handle it, jump in and
     break it up.
   - Call public safety!!
   - Once the fight has broken up, make
     sure no one is hurt. If someone is
     hurt, get them the help that they
     need (call an RA or RD or Public
     Safety).
* If you think that someone is in an unhealthy relationship (unhealthy = abusive, coercive, possessive, but once again, trust your judgment):
  - If you're friends with one of them, talk to them about it. If you're friends with both of them, talk to them separately.
  - Voice your concerns; tell them what you have seen or heard, tell them why you are concerned, but approach them with respect and understanding (consult the "communication, communication" section of this zine!).

* If you don't feel comfortable approaching someone face-to-face, you can visit the RISE office and schedule a meeting with you and person or people in question.

When you are expressing your concerns, language is something to be highly considered. For example, if you are talking to a friend or acquaintance about their unhealthy relationship, make sure not to use blaming language. Examples of blaming language are questions like these: "Why are you still in this relationship?" or "Why don't you just leave?"

Sometimes when communication does not work, it is okay to get help. There are many resources on campus together that can assist you. There is Kelly Kelbel, the RISE Project director, who can help you plan an intervention. There is the RISE Crew, RISE Advocates, and RA's and RC's, who are willing to help you when you need it.
When you're intervening in a situation, the people who you are talking to are probably viewing the situation differently. For example, if you see a really drunk friend being lead off by a sober person and feel like you should help your friend, the sober person probably sees it as fine and none of your business. Don't let this throw you off! Just because you and this person aren't seeing eye to eye doesn't mean you should walk away. Sometimes it could be more beneficial to try to help your intoxicated friend out by walking with them back to their room.

Don't just listen passively - be an active listener. Active listening is when you listen to someone and make comments or gestures that visibly show that you are listening. When you come to a friend with concern about their unhealthy relationship, it's very important sometimes just to listen to what they have to say. By doing this you are supporting the person and being a "mirror" for their feelings. Many people who experience abuse do not see it as abuse, and sometimes talking with a supportive person can help them gain a new perspective and see what's unhealthy about their situation.

It is important to express your concerns when you are intervening. Make yourself clear. Sometimes you see a situation that you know you should intervene in, but you might freeze and not do anything. Sometimes, that situation can stay in your mind afterwards. You can still do something about it!

Here are some creative ways of intervening after you have seen a violent or coercive situation: (these strategies can also be employed even if you have intervened directly during the situation)

* Send an anonymous letter to someone's CPC. Tell them that you saw what happened and tell them exactly what you think about it. If you saw them doing something that was inappropriate, let them know that it was messed up and that next time, you won't hesitate to intervene (because next time, you shouldn't!).
  * If you feel comfortable reporting someone, you should. Talk to Cathy Kramer or Kelly Kelbel.

* Get a group of friends together and stage a theater performance or radical cheer.

* Ignore the person who you saw doing something messed up in the situation. Also encourage your friends to do the same. Let them know that if they make the choice to behave in that manner, then you don't want anything to do with them. This might be difficult if they are involved in your personal group of friends, but it can send a powerful message.
Communication

Communication

So, it can be very hard to intervene in any given situation when you really have no idea what to say. When you are in a situation where you must act immediately, it can be hard to find the right words and every situation is different. There are some questions to ask yourself before approaching the situation:

- Are you in a space that is safe? Meaning, if there is a situation that has escalated (ex. A fight between a couple), can you quickly leave the space?

- Are there people that are around if you need assistance? Such as an RA or RD?

- Are the two (or more) people intoxicated? If so, will you need assistance?

Situations where you feel as though you should intervene can feel awkward, but intervention is helpful and often necessary. Even if you don’t know the people that are involved, it is important to step in when you see an unsafe situation. In order to have clear, successful communication when you are in a situation where you feel you need to intervene, here are some things to consider:
Hey Sheep! Long time no see!
Hey Lion! This is my new animal friend Pig!
You know how I feel about leaving other animals behind? I have to talk to you.

Hey, did you guys hear that Lenny got drunk and hit the horse in the face?
Yes, it was so bad. Why are you spreading that around?

Pig seems really creepy and possessive. But Sheep and I have been friends for a long time and I don't want to jeopardize that. What can I do?

Sheep, we've been friends for years. I love you but I don't like how Pig is treating you. It's really disrespectful.

But Pig lives here. GRUMBLE GRUMBLE GRrr...

That doesn't mean Pig can't treat you poorly. In my case, I was there for you.

ACTUALLY...
IT AIN'T JUST DRAMA, MAMA!

Viewing sexual assault and dating/relationship violence as "just drama" and "none of my business" is really hurtful and dismissive, and helps allow these things to keep happening. Relationships and sex lives might be seen as private matters, but if someone is hurting others it becomes everyone's business. So if you hear someone dismissing stories of assault as drama, take em down gray with a good strong yell of "IT AIN'T JUST DRAMA!" We have to talk about our community ethic here, let's put it in action!
Well, hello Panda!

Hey, you cute little panda. Let's go back to my house and have a little fun.

Why, sure!

GRRR 

YARRRR

Even if I climb up there and see what's going on?

Well, I hate you and I hate your ass Face. Squirrel!

Hey, is everything okay? Do you guys need any help? Nancy, do you want to circle the drunk with me and keep an eye on him so you can cool off?

If you can't break up the fight, you can:
1. Stay nearby, make sure it doesn't escalate
2. Call the RA/RO
3. Call Public Safety if it gets violent