

my sister  
my responsibility



a program by zeta tau alpha  
preventing and confronting hazing

## What are We Really About?: Exploring Values Within the Organization

*Developed by Alan D. Berkowitz  
Expert and national speaker on hazing and related topics*

### **Learning Objectives:**



1. To understand the purpose and values of the organization
2. To provide support and help to members when needed
3. To understand why we sometimes fail to provide this support



### **Technical Requirements:**

Flip chart and markers



### **Handouts:**

What is Hazing? (in the Resources section)

### **Time Needed:**

45 minutes

### **Group Size:**

15-30 people — The workshop is designed to foster interaction and discussion, so a smaller size group is desirable.

### **Physical Setting:**

A space that is private with no distractions

### **Room Setup:**

Everyone seated informally, ideally so that participants can see each other and the facilitators

### **Preparation:**

Read the introduction to the 2008 National Hazing Prevention Week Student Resource Guide entitled, “Understanding Bystander Behavior: A White Paper on Bystander Behavior.”

Come up with two or three situations when a member behaved in an irresponsible way, harmful to herself or others, and/or which put the reputation of the chapter at risk. Make sure these are general and do not give specifics that would identify a particular sister or situation. Come up with a list of things that other members of the chapter, who were bystanders, could have done to intervene or prevent the situation from occurring, and what kept them from doing so.

Look up the university and state hazing policies and add them to the What is Hazing? handout under the Resources tab to create a handout that includes all three. Be sure to review these in advance to gain a clear understanding of each and any differences between them.

### **Resources:**

Excerpts from “Understanding Bystander Behavior: A White Paper on Bystander Behavior”

## **INTRODUCTION (5 minutes)**

*The facilitator(s) should introduce himself/herself, welcome and thank everyone for attending the session.*

### **Desired Outcomes**



Today we have three goals: To understand the purpose and values of the organization; to provide support and help to members when needed; and to understand why we sometimes fail to provide this support.

### **In Preparation:**

- Read the introduction to the 2008 National Hazing Prevention Week Student Resource Guide entitled, "Understanding Bystander Behavior: A White Paper on Bystander Behavior."
- Look up the university and state hazing policies. Put them on the What is Hazing? handout for participants to keep.
- State hazing policies can be found on [www.stophazing.org](http://www.stophazing.org).
- Do not print/read the entire law – summarize it to create a more clear understanding.

## **OUR VALUES AND MISSION (8 minutes)**

Let's start by reminding ourselves of the purpose of our organization and what it means to us.



Find a partner near you, and take a few minutes each to share with each other what you believe is the mission of the organization and what it stands for.

*(After a few minutes, ask participants to finish talking and ask for volunteers to share for what they came up with. If participants share for their partners, ask them to share only for themselves. Summarize what you have heard.)*



Now let's read our national purpose statement to see if it matches with how we feel about our organization. *(Write this statement on the flip chart for extra emphasis.)*

The purpose of Zeta Tau Alpha is to intensify friendship, promote happiness among its members, to perform such deeds, and to mold such opinions as will conduce to the building up of a purer and nobler womanhood in the world.



- Does that correspond what we came up with?
- Is what we value in our organization consistent with what's its defined purpose is?

## **VALUES INTO ACTION (10 minutes)**

I'd like each of you to think of a time when you or someone in the organization did not live up to these ideals, specifically by doing something that put themselves at risk of harm, or hurt the reputation of the chapter. Our discussion will be very general and you will not be asked to give details or to provide information that would serve to identify anyone. Think quietly about this situation for a few minutes.

Now ask yourself, if there were others present who could have done something to prevent the situation from occurring? What kept these members from intervening to prevent the problem?

- Would anyone share the situations they have been thinking about?
- Why don't we intervene in such situations?



Some of you may know from classes that you've taken in psychology, social psychology or sociology that there are a number of common reasons why people don't intervene to help. Let's review them and compare them with the reasons we gave.

*(Review each of the following reasons and ask the audience to comment on them. Compare the reasons the group came up with on why people do not intervene with the researched reasons. Point out how each of the reasons are based on assumptions that may not be correct. See excerpts from White Paper for additional discussion points.)*

**Note to the Facilitator:**

- If the discussion is good and the audience has come up with a number of reasons, then the workshop can proceed. If the discussion is not adequate, then the facilitator can present one or two of the scenario's that they prepared for the workshop and ask the audience why people might not intervene in these situations.

**In Preparation:**

- To prepare for this discussion, the facilitator should have read the accompanying material on bystander behavior located in the White Paper accompanying this module.

Social Influence—"I (or others) assumed that it wasn't serious because no one else did anything."

Audience Inhibition—"I (or others) was afraid of embarrassing myself or calling attention to myself."

Diffusion of Responsibility—"I assumed that someone else would do something."

Social Norms—"I thought that it wasn't a problem because no one else seemed to mind."

**PROBLEM SOLVING (13 minutes)**

Knowing these reasons, let's come up with some ideas of what each of us can do in the future if situations like those we have discussed happen.



- How should we intervene in situations like the ones we discussed?
- What are some positive ways to intervene?

*You may make suggestions during or after the discussion, including:*

- Talk to the person you are worried about, in a gentle, loving and non-judgmental way to ask her if she is okay or let her know what you are noticing.
- Talk to other members to see if they share your concern.
- Develop a plan for how you might intervene and get others to support you in making it happen.

## **CLOSING (2 minutes)**

Thank you for your attention and ideas. Remember that you are part of a group of members who care about each other and who can make a positive difference in each other's lives. Often, the reasons why we don't help or intervene are based on misunderstandings of the situation and what others feel.

Remember what we are all here for—what our purpose is: The purpose of Zeta Tau Alpha is to intensify friendship, promote happiness among its members, to perform such deeds, and to mold such opinions as will conduce to the building up of a purer and nobler womanhood in the world.



### **Note to Facilitator:**

- Distribute What is Hazing? handout to make sure participants leave with clear reminder of how ZTA, their university and state define hazing

# Understanding Bystander Behavior: A “White Paper” on Bystander Behavior

*Excerpts Published in the 2008 National Hazing Prevention Week Conference Handbook*

*Alan Berkowitz, Ph.D.*

*October 10, 2007*

*This excerpt on “why people don’t intervene” is from a longer overview of research and theory on bystander behavior that was written to accompany “Bystander Intervention Training,” a program developed and copyrighted by the author. Please do not use or reproduce this article without permission. For more information about this training and included materials contact Alan Berkowitz at alan@fltg.net*

## **Introduction**

A bystander is someone who witnesses a problem behavior and does not do something about it. Most health problems and social injustices in our schools and communities are witnessed by bystanders. Although many of us are uncomfortable being in a bystander role and want to do something when we observe problematic behavior, often we don’t. Why don’t individuals intervene? Answering this question is critical as we seek to create communities and institutions which foster health and social justice and where shared values are expressed in action.

“Bystander Intervention Training” is designed to help individuals express our values in action when encountering problematic situations. It is the fruit of over twenty-five years of work and thinking about effective strategies to promote health and social justice, as well as the product of my personal frustration with myself when I have been a bystander. The goal of the training and of the white paper from which this excerpt is taken is to reduce barriers that keep individuals from intervening by helping participants to: 1) understand why we are bystanders even when inaction goes against our conscience and better judgment; 2) provide more options for how someone might intervene, and; 3) teach skills for effective interventions that are respectful, gentle, and appropriate. Many people think of intervening as an “in your face” uncomfortable interaction when this need not be the case.

Before you continue further I encourage you to think of a few situations in which you have been a bystander and wanted to intervene, but didn’t. You can keep these situations in mind as you read this paper to see if the theory and research fits with your personal experience, and also to see if the information contained here might help you to respond differently in the future.

It is my sincere hope that experiencing the training and reading excerpts from this paper will help you find ways to intervene effectively to promote health and social justice and, as a result, to feel better about yourself as a person who can bring about change in the world. Thank you in advance for your efforts to be a peace-maker, resolve conflicts, and build bridges that will allow you to be an advocate for health and an ally to mistreated groups.

## **Why people don’t intervene**

The published literature on bystander behavior suggests that most people want to respond but may not do so for three reasons: social influence, audience inhibition, and diffusion of responsibility (Latane & Nida, 1981). Finally, fear of retaliation may inhibit individuals from intervening. A fifth reason is provided by recent research on social norms suggesting that individuals may not intervene due to misperceptions

regarding how others feel about the situation. Each of these five reasons is described in more detail below.

**Social influence.** An individual bystander who observes the behavior of other bystanders not intervening may incorrectly assume that there isn't a problem (social influence). In this situation one may think "it looks like something is wrong, but no one else is doing anything, so maybe it's not so bad after all."

**Fear of embarrassment.** Another inhibiting factor is the fear of acting in a way that might cause embarrassment to oneself or others (audience inhibition). In this situation, I may be concerned about calling negative attention to myself if I intervene, or of embarrassing the person I am confronting. Thus, concerns about how others will respond to me if I intervene can inhibit me from acting on my concern.

**Diffusion of responsibility.** A third reason documented in the research occurs when I assume that someone else will do something, thereby alleviating myself of the necessity to intervene (diffusion of responsibility). I may think "I'm sure that someone else will do something" and wait to see if they do. A simple example is when the electricity goes out. Do you call the electric company to notify them, or do you assume that the problem has already been reported?

**Fear of retaliation.** A fourth reason that individuals may choose to remain as bystanders is that they may legitimately fear a negative consequence or retaliation if they intervene (fear of negative consequences). This may include fear of physical and/or emotional harm, retaliation, lack of support from superiors for attempting to intervene, and negative reactions or comments from others. This fear may be heightened if an individual has had a previous negative experience in a similar situation and is reminded of it. Because the potential for retaliation is real, a bystander may legitimately decide to not do anything. Fears about retaliation can be minimized if an intervention is done in a way that reduces defensiveness, does not challenge the other person, and which is indirect. Options for how to intervene are described later in this paper.

**Pluralistic ignorance and bystander behavior.** A fifth reason for not intervening is pluralistic ignorance, or misperceiving others' concern and desire for intervention. This reason for bystander behavior is provided by social norms theory and research, which suggests that individuals underestimate others' discomfort and desire to intervene. This occurs when the majority who are concerned and want to act incorrectly believe that they are in the minority, acquiescing to what is perceived as the majority view by being silent. Believing that you are in the minority when you are actually in the majority is called pluralistic ignorance (Miller & McFarland, 1987, 1991; Prentice & Miller, 1996; Toch & Klofas, 1984). In comparison with "social influence" (described above), which is misjudgment based on others' outer behavior, pluralistic ignorance occurs when a misjudgment is made about others' internal states.

Pluralistic ignorance encourages individuals to suppress healthy attitudes and behaviors because they are incorrectly thought to be non-conforming. It also provides encouragement for some individuals to engage in unhealthy behaviors because they assume that "everyone does it" or feels the same as them. Prentice and Miller (1996), two of the most influential theorists on pluralistic ignorance, noted that: "The norm simply must be powerful enough to induce people to act in ways that do not correspond to their private thoughts and feelings... Individuals recognize that their own norm-congruent behavior is at variance with their true sentiments, but then do not assume a similar discrepancy in others. Instead, their social perception is guided by what they observe: They infer that the actions of others reflect accurately what they are thinking and feeling." (p.162)

Is there evidence that individuals underestimate others' concerns about problem behavior? A number of

studies of pluralistic ignorance suggest that this is a widespread phenomenon. For example, in a 1968 study of white American's attitudes towards desegregation O'Gorman (1975) found that most white Americans grossly exaggerated the support of other white Americans for racial segregation. This misperception had the effect of reducing an individual's willingness to act on behalf of integration. With respect to violence in gangs, Matza (1964) observed that gang members engaged in actions that they personally disapproved of because they incorrectly believed that others supported the behavior. In one of the first studies on pluralistic ignorance, Katz and Allport (1931) determined that most fraternity members favored greater diversity in their houses but chose to exclude those who were different because they believed their peers were less tolerant than themselves and would not be willing to accept members of these groups into the house. In each of these examples, healthy behavior was inhibited as a result of pluralistic ignorance, while intolerant, problematic or unhealthy behavior was expressed or overlooked.

Two studies of attitudes towards lesbian, gay and bisexual students found that heterosexual students who were uncomfortable with homophobia incorrectly perceived that other straight students on campus to be less accepting of LGB students than they were themselves (Bowen & Bourgeois, 2001; Dubuque, Ciano-Boyce & Shelley-Sireci, 2002). A similar finding was found in a recent study of misperceived social norms in relation to second hand effects of alcohol use, where many students underestimated other's concern about the problem behaviors and also underestimated others' desire to have something done to prevent the behavior (Berkowitz, 2006). In this study student leaders also underestimated the desire of the students they were "leading" to have something done.

Misperceptions of this nature cause people to remain as bystanders. Thus, correcting misperceptions about others desire to intervene is one potential means for reducing bystander behavior. For a review of the role of misperceptions in fostering bystander behavior with respect to sexual assault see Berkowitz (2007).

### **The presence of others can inhibit the desire to help**

Social influence, fear of embarrassment, diffusion of responsibility and pluralistic ignorance all inhibit the desire to help because of incorrect assumptions about the actions and beliefs of others. Research suggests that the presence of other people inhibits the desire to help in an exponential fashion. For example, one person is more likely to help when alone, two bystanders are more likely to intervene than when there are three, etc. In studies of individuals witnessing emergencies, for example, 55% of individuals offered help when alone, while only 22% did so in a group (Latane & Nida, 1981). Thus, incorrect beliefs about how others view the situation and whether they define it as a problem may cause individuals to inhibit healthy behavior.

Social influence, audience inhibition, diffusion of responsibility, fear of retaliation and pluralistic ignorance are all normal thought processes that occur when human beings observe problem situations. As we become aware of these thought processes within ourselves we can correct them when they are based on misinformation or false assumptions, thereby increasing the likelihood that we will express our concerns in action by not being bystanders. More recent research on bystander behavior provides good news about the potential for creating environments that will encourage individuals to intervene. This research suggests that individuals are more likely to intervene when they participate in a cohesive group that communicates and develops norms about intervening. Harada (1975) noted that when "...the degree of consensus to help is strong enough, people will be more helpful in the presence of others" (p. 178). In addition, having role models who are willing to help, actually witnessing others who intervene, and receiving requests to help from others all serve to lower the barriers to intervention (for a literature review, see Batson, 1998 and Meyers, 1999). This more recent research leads to the optimistic conclusion that participating in training and consciousness

raising experiences, such as “bystander intervention training,” can help to reduce bystander behavior by fostering cohesive groups that share norms and actions that will support those who are willing to intervene.

### **Trust your instincts and you inner voice**

The explanations reviewed here for bystander behavior shed light on an underlying and pervasive phenomenon within our culture suggesting that individuals are willing to put aside their own concerns about intervening in favor of what they think others think. Why is this? The answer to this question is complicated but the conclusion is simple: it is important that we learn to trust our inner instincts and our “inner voice.” This is a practice that requires discipline in a society that is so externally focused, with continual appeals from the media to define ourselves only in relation to external appearances. In contemporary society we are taught to focus our attention externally, not internally. This leads us to ignore or downplay our internal cues and sense of distress. In his book “The Gift of Fear” writer Gavin DeBecker noted that humans are the only species of animal who are taught to consciously ignore internal cues of distress. These cues are the product of thousands of years of biological evolution that has taught humans and other animals to respond to situations that may involve danger. To counter this unhealthy trend it is important that we adopt practices and lifestyles that provide opportunities and spaces for us to focus internally, develop intuition, and experience quiet. This can include practices such as meditation, journaling, quiet walks in nature, time alone for reflection, etc.

How others feel is important and we should certainly respect, honor and seek to understand the attitudes and beliefs of others. However, consideration of others should not be at the expense of our own attitudes and values. In addition, when we do take others’ views into consideration, it is important that we have correct information about how they feel and think. Thus, learning to be a healthy person who is capable of intervening involves taking time to listen to our “inner voice,” develop our intuition, and disconnect from external stimuli that constantly demand our attention.

*Together we can make a difference.  
Thank you for helping to make the world a better place  
and for your willingness to be a peacemaker and bridge builder.*