

# Bystander Intervention on Workplace Harassment

Sandy Hershcovis  
Associate Dean (Academic) and Professor  
Haskayne School of Business  
University of Calgary, Canada



- Not much!
  - Few studies have investigated bystander intervention
  - Preliminary evidence suggests:
    - Bystander training (Green Dot) reduces sexual violence on college campuses (Coker et al., 2016)
    - Training was 4-6 hours delivered to student leaders

- Bystanders of workplace harassment...
  - May develop negative attitudes towards perpetrators
  - Sometimes join in on the harassment
  - <10% of bystanders confront perpetrators
    - Power increases intervention likelihood
  - 70% of bystanders support victims

Hershcovis et al., 2017; Hershcovis & Bhatnagar 2017; Mitchell et al., 2015; Reich & Hershcovis, 2015

- Intervention may be risky
  - Perpetrators harass to protect status
  - When victims speak up they experience retaliation
  - Bystanders are likely also at risk

Cortina & Magley, 2003; Hershcovis, Vranjes, Cortina, & Berdahl, in progress

- Silence may be safer
  - Perpetrators are often powerful, central players
    - They control access to resources
    - They have close ties to other powerful people
  - Bystanders do not want to risk their position in social networks

Hershcovis, Vranjes, Cortina, & Berdahl, in progress

- May not “rise to the standard” of harassment
  - Gender harassment constitutes the majority of workplace harassment
    - Convey hostile attitudes towards members of one gender
  - How do you intervene when something is ambiguous
  - Reporting will fail to achieve a desirable outcome

- Whether bystander intervention is effective
  - Does it stop harassment? Under what conditions?
- How *specifically* should they intervene?
- How perpetrators and victims perceive intervention?
- The risks to bystanders
  - How can bystanders *safely* (and effectively) intervene?

- Cautionary conclusion:
  - It's too soon to scale up bystander intervention programs
  - We need much more research
  - We need access to investigate how bystanders can safely intervene at work

Thank you

[m.hershcovis@ucalgary.ca](mailto:m.hershcovis@ucalgary.ca)

# How Can Bystanders Intervene?

## Intervention Immediacy

		Low	High
		Offer support to victim	Deflect harasser's attention
Level of Involvement	Low	Offer support to victim	Deflect harasser's attention
	High	Report harasser after incident	Confront harasser
10		Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005	