**BYSTANDER INTERVENTION**

**Peter Burch**

**Housekeeping and Announcements**

**Chalice Lighting and Opening Words**

"The price of privilege is the moral duty to act when one sees another person treated unfairly. And the least that a person in the dominant caste can do is not make the pain any worse." Isabel Wilkerson, Caste

**Check-in (what was important for you these last two weeks?)**

**Topic Introduction**

BYSTANDER INTERVENTION: What and Why?

Anti-racist counter actions contribute to the marketplace of ideas and our shared public space, by countering hate speech with pro-equality ideas. It is based on the theory of “bystander intervention” against hate.

Bystander anti-racism is conceptualized as action taken by “ordinary” people in response to incidents of interpersonal or systemic racism.

Bystander anti-racism is an action taken by a person or persons (not directly involved as a target or perpetrator) to speak out about or to seek to engage others in responding (either directly or indirectly, immediately or at a later time) against interpersonal or systemic racism.

Public condemnation through bystander anti-racism can potentially combat “false consensus effects” that result from individuals overestimating general community support for their racist views.

The established positive effect of bystander anti-racism on perpetrators is to constrain their racist behaviors, challenging their consensus perceptions, and constructing racist acts as a deviance.

From "Anti-racist Bystander Intervention" by the Tennessee anti-racist network.

BYSTANDER INTERVENTION: How?

DO make your presence as a witness known. If possible, make eye contact with the person being harassed and ask them if they want support. Move yourself near the person being harassed. If you feel you can risk doing so, create distance or a barrier between the person being harassed and the attacker. If it’s safe to do so-and the person being harassed consents-film or record the incident.

DO take cues from the individual being harassed. Is the person engaging with the harasser or not? You can make suggestions, “Would you like to walk with me over here? Move to another train car? For him to leave you alone?,” and then follow their lead. Notice if the person being harassed is resisting in their own way, and honor that. (Especially white folks, don’t police the tone of the person being harassed). Follow up with the individual being harassed after the incident is over, see if they need anything else.

DO keep both of you safe. Assess your surroundings-are there others nearby you can pull in to support? Working in a team is a good idea, if it is possible. Can you and the person being harassed move to a safer space/place?

DON'T call the police. For many communities experiencing harassment right now (including Arab and Muslim communities, Black people, queer and trans folks, and immigrants) the police can cause a greater danger for the person being harassed.

DON'T escalate the situation. The goal is to get the person being harassed to safety, not to incite further violence from the attacker.

DON'T do nothing. Silence is dangerous-it communicates approval and leaves the victim high and dry. If you find yourself too nervous or afraid to speak out, move closer to the person being harassed to communicate your support with your body.

From "The Do's and Don'ts of Bystander Intervention" by the American Friends Service

Committee

**Vignettes**

a. You are attending a march commemorating the first anniversary of the murder of George Floyd. A young white man is standing near you wearing a frown and a T-shirt with a confederate battle flag on it. Two young women of a subordinated class march by carrying a Black Lives Matter banner between them. He steps into the street, standing between the two women, blocking their passage. They stop.

b. Your sister is staying with you for a post-covid visit. Over a glass of wine you say something about reparations. She responds in a stern tone saying that she disagrees strongly with ANY reparation efforts because, "Those people have been taking government hand-outs for years and they just squander the money."

**Questions for Discussion** [in response to one or both of the vignettes above]

1. How would observing this situation make you feel? Why?

2. Do you feel you would respond differently depending upon whether the people involved were

strangers or people you know?

3. What could prevent you from doing something in this situation?

4. If you chose to intervene, what would you most wish to accomplish?

5. How has reading Caste influenced how you think or feel about this situation?

6. How do you relate what you think you would do now to what you may have done in the

past?

7. Have you ever been confronted with similar incidents?

**Open Discussion**

**Check-out/Likes & Wishes: How are you feeling after this session?**

**Closing Words and Extinguishing the Chalice:**

“We are responsible for our own ignorance or, with time and openhearted enlightenment, our own wisdom.” Isabel Wilkerson, Caste