Social Diffusion Theory in Practice (Taken from the University of Kentucky’s Green Dot Campaign.)

“Social diffusion theory (Rogers, 1983) is based on the premise that behavior change in a population can be initiated and then will diffuse to others if enough natural and influential opinion leaders within the population visibly adopt, endorse and support an innovative behavior. Based on this model, popular opinion leaders (POLS) of any given population are systematically identified, recruited, and trained to serve as behavior change “endorser”s” within their community and sphere of influence, resulting in a shift in the targeted attitudes and behaviors within that community. In other words, opinion leaders shape social/behavior changes by making it easier for others to initiate and maintain certain “new” behaviors. Diffusion of innovation theory and the influence of popular opinion leaders to establish new behavioral trends has been studied extensively for decades and proven widely successful across settings and content areas (Kelly et al., 1997; Kelly, 2004; Sikkema, 2000).”

Violence prevention requires broad-based, community level change. This premise behind social diffusion is to: “form a critical mass of individuals endorses and engages in targeted behaviors that are proactively and visibly intolerant of violence. Since few organizations have the resources to provide direct training to enough individuals to obtain this critical mass, strategically targeting the most socially influential individuals becomes necessary, as these “popular opinion leaders” can then most effectively and efficiently impact the attitudes and behaviors of their peers through modeling, endorsing and engaging in the targeted behaviors.”

Application to Violence Prevention: As the Social Diffusion Theory demonstrates the power of identifying socially influential individuals to endorse and exhibit targeted behaviors, the bystander research provides the targeted behavior we want endorsed. These behaviors include actively intervening in situations that are imminently or potentially high-risk for violence, as well as effective means to elicit that targeted behavior. Further, this body of research provides specific strategies to actually increasing the likelihood that the trained popular opinion leaders will actually intervene when they are in the role of a bystander.

For more information, please reference:

http://www.kdva.org/greendot/scientificbasis.html
**Research Supporting Bystander Intervention Approaches:**


**Understanding Bystander Behavior**

Several disciplines have contributed to decades of research outlining the basic principles in understanding bystander behavior, including: communication psychology, persuasion and marketing, social psychology, sociolinguistics, social change models, behavior change models, and aspects of motivation through the sports psychology literature.

The current body of literature shows that bystanders will remain bystanders for several reasons, including: pluralistic ignorance, diffusion of responsibility, misperceived costs of intervention and/or costs/rewards of intervening and not intervening, as well as personal efficacy, apathy, empathy, various audience effects.

**Research Supporting Bystander Behavior:**


Covey, S. (1990). *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*.


The *5 Point Formula*. Adapted from University of Massachusetts, Amherst Health Services, Virginia Alcohol Safety Action Program and The BACCHUS Network.


**Perpetrator Data (Taken from the scientific basis of the University of Kentucky’s Green Dot Campaign)**

“There is a growing body of research that gives insight into the behaviors and patterns of perpetrators. Research on batterers demonstrates the mechanisms most often used to exert power and control over a target – from the earliest warning signs to the most extreme forms of violence (Johnson et al., 2006). Literature examining the behaviors of sexual offenders, particularly offenders known to the victim, gives profound and clear insight into their patterns – including how they target, assess, and isolate a victim (Lisak & Roth, 1988; Lisak & Miller, 2002). There is also significant research delineating the characteristics, risk factors, psychosocial and psychological attributes of physical, sexual and emotional child abusers (i.e., Finkelhor & Ormond, 2001; Milner & Dopke, 1997; Rodriguez & Price, 2004; Quinsey & Lalumiere, 2001).”

**Research Supporting the Understanding of Perpetrator/Violator Behavior**

Lisak, D. & Miller, P. M. (2002). Recent Rape and Multiple Offending Among Undetected Rapists. *Violence and Victims*, 17(1), 73-84.


**Understanding Victimization/Perception of Threat/Risk Assessment**


**Persuasion and Compliance Gaining**


**Sociolinguistics, the concept of “Self,” and “Saving Face”**


**Face Saving is well documented in the conflict resolution field**

**Motivation, Behavior Change, and Social Movement and Social Learning Theories**

Behavior change models are used to implement programs or interventions that produce desired behavioral changes. To do so, the key variables of behavior change models must be taken into account, and the link between behavior change, attitude, and motivation must be accounted for.

For comprehensive information, please refer to:

http://www.dfid.gov.uk/r4d/PDF/Outputs/CommGAP/BehaviorChangeweb.pdf

**Research Supporting Social Change Theories:**


Community Readiness Model/Platform Development

Community Readiness refers to how ready a community is to address an issue or make an effort to act on a proposed social change. An intervention program must match a community's level of readiness in order to succeed. Efforts that are too ambitious are likely to fail because community members will not be ready (open to the message) or able to respond (lack of efficacy or belief in the proposed behavior change). See also “Adolescent egoism” and “Perceived invulnerability.”

Research Supporting the Need for Community Readiness:


After an extensive, although not exhaustive, review of the literature, I have come to several conclusions that I will be presenting at the VDI Conference. Among them:

**Why Bystanders Remain Bystanders:**

- Perceived costs of helping (high vs. low risk) (i.e. time, money effort)
- Perceived costs of not helping (high vs. low risk) (i.e. guilt, criticism, danger)
- Perceived vs. Actual level of responsibility
- Perceived vs. Actual level of competence
- Perception of threat (fail to recognize situation as a threat) (see adolescent egoism, or egoism, and perceived invulnerability.

**This is where most programs fail! They fail to teach threat assessment/assessment of risk. One of my basic arguments is that if people don’t recognize the behavior as a threat, or recognize the breach in social contract, they will not act! This opinion, as far as I know and have read, is unique to me. It’s my conclusion.**

**The Keys to Bystander Mobilization:**

- Changing the perceived personal cost of intervention- recognizing the bystander effect (addressing diffusion of responsibility)
- Changing the perceived personal cost of not intervening- accounting for the hot and cold empathy gap
- Recognizing the red flags (risk assessment) and a comprehensive threat assessment (having the skills/knowledge/ability/training/efficacy/competence)
**Again, this is where most programs fall short.**

**Shortcomings of Current Programs: (Again, I believe these conclusions are unique to me)**

- Fail to address perception of threat/perception of responsibility

- Too much awareness raising (posters, ribbons, and buttons) and too little training. Research shows these programs may change the student’s attitudes or beliefs, but has not been able to demonstrate successful behavior change.

- They give a lot of what, without a lot of how. *One of my primary points against current programs, is that by incorporating a bystander intervention program, we are ASSUMING a peaceful/verbal resolution to a conflict. In which case, a bystander intervention program MUST have a strong communications/life skills basis, or we are just setting up people to fail.*

- They focus too much on the message being delivered (i.e. bullying prevention sexual assault prevention, specific content), and whom it’s being delivered to (i.e. the perpetrators, the victims, etc), and FAIL to focus on who it’s being delivered by (i.e. relatability, credibility, trustworthiness of the speaker, or the ability to identify with a speaker).

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Even though I referenced the University of Kentucky’s research for the Green Dot Campaign, they do not have the most comprehensive or effective life skills/bystander program. The best program by far, is the University of Arizona’s STEP UP program, developed in part by BACCHUS and the NCAA. This program was developed, in part, by a nationally known sports psychology consultant Jeff Janssen, who utilized much of the theoretical framework that I am familiar with through my sports psychology training.

For more information, please reference:
