



## Delta Gamma Well Aware

Encompasses eight dimensions: Social, Spiritual, Physical, Emotional, Vocational, Intellectual, Financial and Leadership Development

### Moving from Inaction to Action: Acting Courageously

You are driving along the highway and notice a car pulled alongside the guardrail. A man is peering into the hood of the car looking hopeless. You quietly say to yourself "I am glad that is not me." You then motor on and continue about your day. You assume someone else called for help or that the stranded man must have a cell phone and called for assistance. Likewise, a friend or friend's daughter is struggling with an eating disorder. You discuss the situation with friends and commiserate on the gravity of the situation. You are worried. However, you never muster the courage to confront your friend.

Or how about the recent incident on a Philadelphia subway car where a passenger was beaten by another man but no one acted to help stop the horrific attack. No one called for assistance either. Instead, one passenger moved to another part of the train car in order to not be disturbed by the attack.

In each of these situations, no one intervened to assist the individual in need. This inaction is known as bystander behavior. Alan Berkowitz (2007) defines a bystander as "someone who witnesses a problem and does not do something about it." Take a moment and reflect on a few recent experiences – when have you responded as a bystander?

The hazing behaviors prevalent in our schools, colleges, athletic teams, and youth groups, to name a few, can also be explained by bystander behavior. Delta Gamma partnered with an innovative organization, HazingPrevention.Org, to collaboratively address the issue of hazing. This week, September 22-26, 2008, marks National Hazing Prevention Week. Together, HazingPrevention.Org and Delta Gamma hope to provide a fresh framework to address hazing. While the bystander model can be utilized to address hazing, it also illuminates the numerous situations in which we each have acted as a bystander.

### Barriers to Intervention

Why don't we intervene when another individual needs assistance? Alan Berkowitz (2007) identified five reasons for lack of intervention:

1. **Social influence.** Individuals observe the reactions of others and respond accordingly. Thus, bystanders observe that no one is acting and incorrectly assume there is not a problem. Research also indicates that the more individuals present, the less likely an individual is to respond.

Therefore, if you are the only person who observes a car pulled alongside the road, you are more likely to respond than if other cars are also passing by the stranded traveler. Likewise, two individual present are more likely to respond than if three or four individuals are present.

2. **Fear of embarrassment.** When a bystander is concerned about either embarrassing him or herself or embarrassing the individual confronted, this fear consumes their response and leads to inaction. Thus, if you are concerned about embarrassing your friend by describing how the vomit from her eating disorder is affecting you, this fear will inhibit your ability to act.
3. **Diffusion of responsibility.** When we assume someone else will respond, we eliminate the need for ourselves to act. If a friend consumes alcohol to unsafe levels and we assume that another friend or family member will address the behavior because of their deeper relationship, we eliminate our responsibility to act.
4. **Fear of retaliation.** When we fear emotional or physical harm as a result of intervention, this fear legitimately inhibits a response. The Philadelphia subway passengers may have been justified in their fear to immediately intervene. Their fear prevented them from identifying other strategies for intervention such as exiting at the next train stop and calling for assistance.
5. **Pluralistic ignorance.** When we incorrectly believe the majority of individuals are not concerned about the behavior, this leads to our inaction as we assume our concern is the minority opinion. Often, the perceived minority opinion is actually the silent majority as many others are concerned but incorrectly make the same assumption. Chapter members who identify a certain activity as hazing often assume their concern is not prevalent since no other chapter members addressed this alarming behavior. Often many members share a similar concern.

Think back to the situation where you identified yourself as a bystander. Which of the above barriers to intervention prevented you from intervening? How did this barrier lead to your inaction? By naming the barrier, you empower yourself to act by making sense of your inaction, ensuring you move from inaction to action the next time you encounter a situation that warrants your response.

### **Stages of Bystander Behavior**

A second way to consider our inaction is to see our lack of response through the stages of the bystander model. As you read these five stages, consider your bystander situation and which stage best explains your reason for not acting. In order to illuminate the issue of hazing, the model is explained through this lens.

1. **Notice the event.** In order to act, bystanders must be aware that hazing occurs and understand what behaviors constitute hazing.
2. **Interpret the behavior as a problem.** Once bystanders identify the behaviors as hazing, the bystanders must understand the physical and psychological harm that results from hazing.
3. **Belief that one has a responsibility to help solve the problem.** Bystanders must understand their responsibility to address hazing behaviors.
4. **Know what to do.** Bystanders require the necessary intervention training to effectively confront the situation.
5. **Possess the capacity for action.** Bystanders must eliminate the 5 barriers to prevention as described above in order to move to action.

### **Bystander Behavior and Delta Gamma's Purpose**

Article II of the Delta Gamma Constitution states:

“The objects of this Fraternity shall be to foster high ideals of friendship among college women, to promote their educational and cultural interests, to create in them a true sense of social responsibility and to develop in them the best qualities of character.”

As members, we commit to uphold these Objects which encourage us to courageously move from inaction to action to ensure we act in a socially responsible manner. By eliminating bystander behavior, we help to develop friendship based on mutual helpfulness and act courageously exhibiting character.

### References

To learn more about bystander behavior and Delta Gamma's sponsorship of HazingPrevention.Org visit [www.hazingprevention.org](http://www.hazingprevention.org)

To access a current study on college student hazing and its prevalence visit [www.hazingstudy.org](http://www.hazingstudy.org)

### References

Berkowitz, A. (2008). An overview of bystander intervention. *National Hazing Prevention Week Resource Guide*.

Berkowitz, A. (2007). Understanding bystander behavior: A "white paper" on bystander behavior to accompany "bystander intervention training." *National Hazing Symposium Resource Guide*.

Marchell, T. & Bureau, D. (2007). A bystander framework for hazing prevention. *Perspectives*.

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