



Re-Envisioning Bystander Programs for Campus Sexual Violence Prevention

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Abstract

Purpose Bystander programs are central to efforts to address CSV prevention. In the U.S., they are mandated in the 2013 Campus Sexual Violence Elimination (Campus SaVE) Act. This practice note shares early exploration on one university campus in re-envisioning bystander programs by centering experiences, analyses, and activism of Black, Indigenous, and other women of color, students and youth, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and gender non-conforming people (LGBTQI+).

Method We conducted a narrative review of the theoretical and empirical literature on bystander intervention programs, drew from documentary and visionary materials on alternative perspectives and practices, and reflected on research, policy, and practice challenges on our own campus.

Results Bystander programs are designed to: enhance community members' awareness, skills, and intervention intentions; address all members of a community; and change behavior by countering widespread misperceptions about the prevalence and acceptability of sexual violence. All three design elements remain aspirational. Intersectional, anti-racist, gender-transformative, and anti-carceral approaches offer strategies for shifting community and social norms to promote community accountability and transformative justice.

Conclusions CSV prevention may be enhanced by re-envisioning U.S. bystander intervention programs and encouraging systemic approaches that integrate intersectional, anti-racist, gender-transformative, and anti-carceral insights and initiatives to promote more inclusive and transformational measures to prevent CSV.

Keywords Violence against women · Prevention · Gender · Bystander · Social norms · Campus sexual violence · Intersectionality · Anti-carceral · Anti-racism

In response to widespread and consequential sexual violence and to demands by students, faculty, and advocates on and off campus, the 2013 U.S. Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act (CSVEA; Pub. Law 113–4 Title III Sec. 304) mandates that “primary prevention and awareness programs include safe and positive options for bystander intervention” (Breiding et al., 2014; Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014; McCallion

& Feder, 2015; Sharoni and Klocke, 2019). The Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) “STOP SV” sexual violence prevention technical package highlights bystander approaches as a key evidence-based strategy for promoting social norms that protect against violence (Basile et al., 2016). Researcher-advocates include bystander programs as an important component of what Banyard and Hamby (2022) term “strengths-based prevention portfolios.”

In this practice note, we re-envision bystander approaches to campus sexual violence (CSV) prevention to encourage researcher-practitioner dialogue about integrating more systemic approaches to prevention efforts on college campuses. In 2019, shortly after the Association of American Universities released updated campus survey results on the prevalence of sexual violence on campuses, the University of Pittsburgh Chancellor called for a reappraisal of prevention efforts in the university community, created an

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advisory council to recommend comprehensive changes (chaired by one of the authors), and established seed grants to fund grassroots initiatives. This practice note reflects on this charge, sharing our early exploration into potential key features of prevention that more intentionally integrate intersectional, anti-racist, gender-transformative, and anti-carceral insights and initiatives to promote more inclusive and transformational changes to prevent CSV.

We offer a brief narrative review of U.S. bystander programs, focusing on how such programs seek to engage the entire community and shift social norms. We center experiences, analyses, and activism of Black, Indigenous, and other women of color, along with students and youth, especially those engaged with movements of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and gender non-conforming people (LGBTQI+). We focus on community accountability and transformative justice perspectives and practices. We identify the significance of recent scholarship grounded in intersectionality, anti-racism, gender transformation, and anti-carceralism as potential bases for re-envisioning bystander programs grounded in social justice and systemic change.

Bystander Intervention and Shifting Community Norms

The frustrating truth is that no one community, school or scholar can lay claim to a solution, and the sheer scale of this issue—which extends well beyond campus communities and into society at large—necessitates a bigger and broader response than we have enacted to date. ... Consequently, I have decided to augment the standard administrative-driven response with a community-driven one. – University of Pittsburgh Chancellor Gallagher, Fall 2019

It makes a lot of sense to say, along with the Chancellor at our university, that when it comes to reducing CSV, “administrative efforts have failed, so leadership, ideas, sweat equity, and ‘drive’ have to come from the community” (University of Pittsburgh Chancellor Gallagher, 2019). Feminist and anti-racist critics note that standard administrative approaches to CSV reproduce impunity and privilege (Messner, 2016; Pascoe and Hollander, 2016). For example, Wade documents the ways that race and class privileges institutionalized in predominately white fraternities contribute to dynamics of social and sexual entitlement that can dominate campus social life (Wade, 2017). Doyle critiques the ways bureaucratic and liability-oriented responses grossly securitize the administration of gender and sexuality on campus (Doyle, 2015; see also Sloan III & Fisher, 2012). Grove and Zadnik observe that to the degree that they expect women to

restrict their activities, risk reduction programs blame victims (Grove & Zadnik, 2012; see also (Gidycz et al., 2015), while Hollander documents the efficacy of incorporating insights from feminist self-defense and empowerment programs into campus responses to sexual assault (Hollander, 2014). Critics such as Gersen and Gersen (2019) and Reece (2019) document instances of ham-fisted training programs that infantilize students and truncate sexual possibilities, naturalizing men as the fearsome subjects of violence and women as fearful objects (Marcus, 1992). And while CSV prevention programs have addressed ‘diversity’ within prevention programming (Heppner et al., 1999), anti-racist scholars have underscored the extent to which histories of oppression and marginalization as well as community resiliency and strengths continue to be erased in sexual violence prevention interventions (Giacci et al., 2022).

Programs that promote peers’ pro-social action – bystander intervention – are a compelling as well as legislatively mandated alternative to top-down approaches and moral admonishment. Bystander programs engage local leaders, generate individual and peer awareness and commitments to campus safety, and develop peer leadership and skills. They promote community participation and multiple levels of culture change based in a Social Norms Approach (SNA), the principal theoretical framework for U.S. government-funded research on CSV prevention. For example, research by social psychologist Lindsay Orchowski and colleagues demonstrates that interventions rooted in the SNA – messages from trusted peers that correct common misperceptions about violence and social tolerance for it – promote pro-social behavior change (Orchowski, 2019). Miller and colleagues, in training athletic coaches to encourage their male-identified middle and high school-age athletes to stop violence against women and girls, have demonstrated substantial increases in self-reported positive bystander behaviors among these adolescents (Miller et al., 2012, 2020). Banyard and collaborators document the ways peer perceptions promote college students’ pro-social action (Banyard et al., 2021, 2020).

Moreover, researchers and practitioners have long argued that the bystander paradigm expands prevention theory and practice to “move beyond changing individuals to changing peer and community interactions, norms, and behaviors ... [and] focus on engaging the entire community, not just those considered at risk” (McMahon & Banyard, 2012). As one proponent summarizes, “Bystander intervention strategies move beyond a focus on individual-level attitudes and frame sexual violence as a community issue, where all individuals have the responsibility to interrupt situations that can lead to sexual assault as well as respond to situations where assaults have occurred” (McMahon, 2017).

Mobilizing entire communities while activating individuals and peer groups to notice and interrupt everything

from casual disrespect to sexual predation (McMahon et al., 2011; Banyard, 2015) strengthens CSV prevention in several ways. For instance, widespread community engagement counters problems such as reliance on punitive admonishment (for a critique and alternatives, see for example, Banyard and Hamby, 2022). Similarly, research on masculinities, social movement organizing, and resistance to change in violence prevention documents the problems of demanding that young men identify with or as perpetrators (Flood, 2019; Ratele, 2014, 2015). For example, Crooks and collaborators investigate the ways, “the link between traditional notions of masculinity and violence makes it difficult for many men to be able to actively participate in violence prevention while maintaining their sense of masculine identity” (Crooks et al., 2007). Banyard and collaborators have pioneered community engagement to overcome the false dichotomy of victims and perpetrators and promote upstanding bystanders (Banyard, 2015). Changing the subjects of CSV prevention from victims and perpetrators to communities of pro-social bystanders buttresses intrapersonal and interpersonal approaches to violence victimization, perpetration, and prevention with changes in the broader community.

At the same time, though, bystander programs remain largely expert-driven; sometimes reproduce default androcentrism, benevolent sexism, white privilege, and cis- and heterosexism; rest heavily on a slender reed of rational choice theory; and focus on liability, reputation and status, and moralism at the expense of more expansive justice goals (Banyard and Hamby (2022) provide critical appreciation). For example, Masters observes that the social marketing campaign “My Strength is Not for Hurting” avoids alienating men as prospective allies in ending violence against women by “othering” perpetrators and encouraging men to be “man enough” to listen to and respect women and stand up to perpetrators (Masters, 2010). The “study of sex, power, and assault” at Columbia University by Hirsch and Khan documents and explains “bystander interventions’ unintended impacts, including that students act as bystanders in ways that sometimes protect the status of group members. Students, almost exclusively men, intervened for reasons of liability, reputation, and moral commitments” (2020, p. 191). Moreover, the bystander model of individual and social change may oversimplify social networks and hierarchies (Wamboldt et al., 2019), and seldom connects CSV to oppression, inequality, power, and privilege. Rentschler documents activist versions of bystander training using social media to connect documenting street harassment to broader mutual aid efforts among youth experiencing marginalization (Rentschler, 2017, 2018). To date, however, few research efforts have linked bystander actions or other mainstream CSV prevention to broader social justice movements (Bonomi, 2018; Rentschler, 2017, 2018; Rothman, 2018).

This emphasis in bystander prevention programs on all members of the community and shared norms that shape everyday interactions may fail to challenge, and even reproduce, pernicious aspects of the status quo. By focusing on universal messages about individual action, for example, some community-based approaches have assumed that everyone is a potential bystander who needs to be motivated and activated (Banyard, 2015). In fact, the audience for CSV prevention consists of a mix of those who have already experienced SV, those who have used SV, witnesses, and people exposed to other forms of violence and oppression. Calling on bystanders may fail to acknowledge violence exposures prior to college matriculation, experiences that are far too common among adolescents and young adults (Banyard and Hamby, 2022; Brush and Miller, 2019; Hirsch and Khan, 2020).

Through focusing on what bystanders do – when, where, why, how, and at what risks to themselves and others – and developing skills of designated campus leaders or peer-identified social influencers, bystander intervention programs seek to diffuse CSV prevention through pre-existing social networks (Coker et al., 2016; McMahon et al., 2019). This social marketing conceptualization of campus communities leaves little room for analyzing privileged or vulnerable students or characteristic features of campuses (e.g., rules, routines, resources, and what Hirsch and Khan (2020) call “sexual geographies”) that reproduce social inequalities (Armstrong et al., 2018). For example, Messner (2016) and Pascoe and Hollander (2016) trace the ways appeals to manly strength and protectionism can reinforce white privilege and both invisibility and stigmatized hypervisibility of racialized and gender diverse students. Hirsch and Khan (2020) document the ways bystander programs mostly protect privileged white college students from stereotyped and sexualized others (Hirsch & Khan, 2020, especially pp. 190–198). The theoretical paradigms that undergird the bystander approach may in fact miss what is at stake for college students who thwart the sexual and social “projects” of their peers. Peers risk stigma and can lose access to important campus networks and resources, as further documented by Hirsch and Khan (2020); aspects of the bystander paradigm run counter to mainstream ideas of “fun” in college life (Armstrong and Hamilton 2015).

How might researchers and practitioners build on the insights and recent critiques of bystander behavior programs? In what follows, we share our examination of existing literature including critiques of bystander programs and articulate potential next steps for CSV prevention practice and research to better integrate community accountability and transformative justice.

Re-Envisioning Bystanding

In this section, we consider community accountability and transformative justice, two fundamental principles proposed by Black feminist prison-industrial complex (PIC) abolitionists such as Mariame Kaba (2021), Angela Davis, Gina Dent, Beth Richie (Davis et al., 2022), Dorothy Roberts (2022), and adrienne maree Brown (2017), whose work centers systemic oppression and strategies to promote social change. By community accountability we mean local capacities and commitments to support survivors to meet their needs for healing and safety and to engage those who have caused harm in the work of recognizing and repairing damage to individuals, relationships, and community. By transformative justice we mean local capacities and commitments to “building a society where it is possible to address harm without relying on structural forms of oppression or the violent systems that increase it” (Kaba, 2021, p. 2).

Community accountability and transformative justice draw from four important concepts that we first define and then use to inform our analysis: intersectionality, anti-racism, gender transformation, and anti-carceralism. We then build on the strengths of bystander programs and illustrate some fault lines in prevention efforts where a theoretical comparison of U.S. and global approaches generates novel insights. Finally, we offer some next steps toward CSV prevention that more clearly articulates a commitment to social justice and transformative changes across our campuses.

Our comparison and re-conceptualization draw from three sources: first, the research literature on “gender-transformative” prevention programs rooted originally in fighting the global HIV/AIDS epidemic (Gottert et al., 2020; Jewkes et al., 2015); second, intersectional feminist theories of gender and insights from feminist self-defense and anti-harassment organizing (Hollander, 2014, 2016; McCaughey and Cermele, 2017); and third, intersectional anti-racist, anti-carceral theories informing violence prevention and community accountability work with and by women, men, and especially transgender youth in the U.S., U.K., and Canada (Armatta, 2018; Kim, 2018, 2021; Rentschler, 2018; Kaba, 2021). Research, advocacy, activism, and practice all point to prevention efforts that engage diverse communities in changing violence perpetration and individual (mis)perceptions of social norms, in challenging the regimes that produce and reproduce gender-based violence and racialized gender hierarchies, and in making change not only interpersonally, but also in the institutions of universities and the state.

By intersectionality, we mean tools for analysis and social action that theorize multiple, interlocking systems

of oppression organizing identities, institutions, policy, and movements for social change (Collins, 2019, 2009; Crenshaw, 1989; Nash, 2019). We recognize that people have integrated intersectionality into higher education, scholarship, and violence prevention in many different ways (Harris and Patton, 2018). Intersectional researchers and theorists analyze multiple identities and myriad sources of marginalization (Crenshaw, 1991; Roberts and Jesudason, 2013); multiple contextual interactions and situations (Decker et al., 2019); complex organizations and institutions with cross-cutting rules, routines, and goals (Kulkarni, 2018; Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005); and multiple sources of assets, coalitions, and strengths as well as oppression, hierarchy, and marginalization (McCauley et al., 2019). As Collins observes, “violence constitutes a saturated site of intersectionality where intersecting power relations are especially visible” (Collins, 2017, p. 1464; see also Armstrong et al., 2018).

By anti-racism, we mean commitment and capacity to counter the invisibility of white supremacy, anti-Blackness, white solipsism (Rich, 1979), and racial inequity in interactions, policies, and institutions. Kendi calls for continuous vigilance and reflection about our interactions, practices, and policies that perpetuate systemic racism (Kendi, 2019). Bonilla-Silva emphasizes the “color-blind” logics that provide ideological cover for persistent racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, 2017). Collins analyzes and resists the confluence of racism and sexism in the social organization of violence (Collins, 1998, 2017). In the context of CSV prevention, calls for anti-racist approaches in violence prevention research are beginning to emerge (Bonar et al., 2020; McCauley et al., 2019; Tajima, 2021).

By gender transformative, we spotlight practices and programs that center intersectional gender justice in measurement, theory, and practice implementation. This means conceiving, measuring, and analyzing gender as relational rather than demographic; as a dynamic spectrum rather than a dichotomous categorical variable; and as a principle of social organization at the individual, interactional, and institutional levels in addition to a group identity (Brush and Miller, 2019; Risman, 2018). Gender transformative approaches counter the naturalized binary that produces, positions, and polices men and women as opposite, unequal, and heterosexually complementary and systems that render transgender and nonbinary individuals invisible or subordinate and monstrous (Bem, 1994; Brush, 2013; Brush, 2003). Moreover, many engage boys and men and empower women and girls to change practices and structures that marginalize or subordinate feminine, transgender, and gender non-conforming people (Dworkin et al., 2015; Spade, 2015; Malatino, 2019).

By anti-carceralism, we mean commitment and capacity to prevent violence and pursue justice and accountability

(as both individual and community engagement), in part, by dismantling punitive campus security and police bureaucracies that surveil, regulate, and administer gender, race, and sexuality. Political theorists and activists from Davis (2003) to Cullors (Cullors, 2021; Khan-Cullors and Bandele, 2018) to Gruber (2020) analyze and resist mass incarceration, the prison-industrial complex, and state violence against people of color, women, poor people, and people with disabilities (see also Coker and Macquoid, 2015). In gender-based violence research, anti-carceral policy and practice change appears more prominently in domestic violence scholarship than in campus sexual assault (Decker et al., 2019; Goodmark, 2019). “Instead of pushing for better reporting, investigation, and adjudication of individual cases, transformative justice directs us to understand and challenge the institutional cultures and structural hierarchies that produce the entrenched environment of hostility and violence” (Russo, 2018, p. 102). Specifically, this critique of CSV prevention highlights the extent to which Title IX offices (responsible for implementing legal mandates) may be conflated with and unnecessarily constrain re-envisioning CSV prevention that seeks to create more restorative and less carceral approaches to creating safer and more inclusive campus environments.

Table 1 illustrates some fault lines in CSV prevention, contrasting universal bystanding interventions with practices that enhance capacities for community accountability and transformative justice. We organize our commentary around generative theoretical and practical insights from this comparison, building on strengths and insights from diverse scholars.

Descriptive Versus Injunctive Norms

U.S. bystander programs attend mostly to *descriptive* norms: (mis)perceptions of the prevalence of violence-supportive attitudes and behaviors (see, e.g., (Fabiano et al., 2003; Gidycz et al., 2011). Critiques of (cis)gender and (hetero)sexual normativity, however, focus on the ways that *injunctive* norms shape behavior and change. That is, (mis)perceptions of the likelihood of negative sanctions and social consequences of counter-cultural attitudes and behavior

shape not only violence perpetration and victimization, but also pro-social bystander intervention intentions (Brush & Miller, 2019; Dworkin and Barker, 2019; Dworkin et al., 2013, 2015). Recent work listening to college students who experience minoritization and oppression has also underscored the need to recognize how racism, homophobia, and transphobia are intertwined with challenges of being “active bystanders” (McMahon et al., 2020). Greater attention to what is at stake in deciding to intervene or not, and encouraging critical examination of how acceptable behavior is defined and by whom, may allow space for counter-narratives and diverse tactics for pro-social bystanding (Yoshihama et al., 2022). Theatrical performances, improv, poetry, and storytelling are strategies campus activists are exploring to ‘center the margins,’ (Harris and Linder, 2017; Hooks, 2014) highlight what is at stake, and problematize simplistic scenarios around intervening (Yoshihama et al., 2022).

Gender Neutrality and Gender Transformation

Gender neutrality (not uncommon in bystander prevention approaches that seek to reach a broad university community) and asymmetrical incorporation of injunctive and descriptive norms means U.S. bystander programs miss the main lessons of the past two decades of findings from global public health research on social norms change for primary violence prevention through an explicit focus on ‘gender transformative’ interventions (Barker et al., 2010; Casey et al., 2016; Dworkin and Barker, 2019). Gender neutrality passes over the myriad ways naturalized gender differences and power organize intrapersonal, interpersonal, and institutional dynamics. Gender neutrality deters programs from engaging those who identify as men and boys specifically; fear of alienating men and boys by asking them to identify with or as perpetrators undermines accountability without addressing entitlement and resistance, while appealing to (cis-hetero) men as protectors of vulnerable women reinforces benevolent sexism. Short-changing injunctive norms and restricting analyses to demographic sex category also leaves researchers and advocates without resources to theorize (let alone address through evidence-based programs) the

Table 1 From ‘universal bystanding’ to ‘re-envisioning bystanding’

CSV Bystander Intervention	Community Accountability and Transformative Justice
Descriptive norms	Injunctive norms
Gender neutrality and/or gender specific	Gender transformative
Universalist, diverse, inclusive	Intersectional, anti-racist, belonging
Peer social networks, communication (both interpersonal and social media/marketing)	Community capacity building; accountability (both individual orientation, assessment, and enforcement and community organizing)
Security and surveillance, mandatory reporting; beyond binary of “victim” and “perpetrator” to include “bystander”	Anti-carceral, mandatory supporting, beyond binary of “danger” and “safety”

normative mechanisms that produce victims, perpetrators, and bystanders as overlapping subjects of gendered violence and prevention programs. Furthermore, missed opportunities to create space for campus communities to grapple with gender and power erase transgender and nonbinary individuals who experience a disproportionate burden of interpersonal violence victimization and are made vulnerable by the failure to center their experiences of marginalization on college campuses. The truncated model of normativity leaves researchers and advocates with little beyond moral exhortation. In the context of campus austerity and crackdowns on student activism, moreover, U.S. CSV prevention programs resort to campus administration and securitization of gender and sexuality (Doyle, 2015; Sloan III & Fisher, 2012). The result not only repositions men and women as naturally complementary and unequal “opposite sexes,” but deepens hyper-surveillance and criminalization of Black and Brown students as well as transgender and nonbinary students and reinforces myths of “stranger danger” based on revitalized racist and gendered stereotypes of hypersexuality, sexual predation, and victim-blaming (Harris & Linder, 2017; Miller, 2019).

From Universalist and Inclusive to Intersectional, Anti-Racist, and Belonging

More recent intentions to create diverse and inclusive scenarios for bystander prevention programs reflect an understanding that prevention programs may have differential effects on participants from diverse backgrounds, including LGBTQI+ students (Coker et al., 2020). Experiences of CSV are not equally distributed; LGBTQI+ and Black, indigenous, and other women of color disproportionately bear the burden of such violence. Intersectional and anti-racist perspectives inspire deeper scrutiny of how prevention programs can avoid inadvertently perpetuating structural inequities. Prevention programs that recognize gender as a principle of social organization and that create opportunities for addressing gender (inclusive of gender identity), racial, and sexual inequities hold promise as tools of emancipatory change: generating critical social diagnosis plus building community coalitions able to strategize and work toward viable, achievable alternatives (Brush & Miller, 2019; Katz et al., 2011; Wright, 2010). Simply acknowledging the extent to which men (and people who identify as transgender, gender queer, and non-conforming) also experience unwanted sexual contact misses the critical opportunity to elucidate how gender itself is a principle of the social organization of unwanted sexual contact on campus and to strategize to change it.

Feminist and queer theories over the last several decades have demonstrated the extent to which claims of ‘gender neutrality’ occlude the diversity of sexual experiences and

gender identities and fail to acknowledge the mechanisms as well as what is at stake in maintaining the status quo. A thorough review of the vast literature on intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) is beyond the scope of this commentary (Harris and Patton, 2018). Briefly, Black and Indigenous women scholars have long underscored the extent to which SV prevention programs erase multiple intersecting oppressions. Efforts at ‘cultural competence’ and ‘diversity’ are vitally important first steps but may inadvertently perpetuate white supremacy and reinforce benevolent sexism (McCaughey et al., 2019; Rudman & Glick, 2021; Wooten, 2017; Heppner et al., 1999). Perhaps most pressing in 2022, fundamental shifts in institutional conversations about systemic racism and policing in the U.S. reveal the extent to which bystander programs may reproduce and reify surveillance and discipline as foundations of CSV prevention and intervention (Harris et al., 2020). Offering myriad anti-carceral alternatives, Black and Indigenous scholars and other scholars of color have drawn attention to community accountability (Russo, 2018) (Kaba, 2021) as well as to transformative justice frameworks (Kim, 2021), with the goal of creating a community where everyone is not only included but belongs.

From Peer Networks and Community Campaigns to Enhancing Community Accountability

Social marketing about healthy relationships (including respectful communication) and related community campaigns are certainly more positive (and effective in increasing understanding of CSV) than top-down, administration-driven approaches (such as mandated online modules). Similarly, culturally responsive programs (tailored to reach diverse audiences and intended to create more inclusion) vastly improve on the color-evasive, gender-neutral, or otherwise racist, sexist, or transphobic administrative status quo. However, as noted above, this social marketing conceptualization of campus communities leaves little room for analyzing privileged or vulnerable students or characteristic features of campuses (e.g., rules, routines, resources, and what Hirsch and Khan (2020) call “sexual geographies”) that reproduce social inequalities (Armstrong et al., 2018).

Bystander intervention programs have been implemented effectively in campus-wide campaigns (Banyard et al., 2014; Brown et al., 2014) as well as in formal and informal peer networks on campus such as fraternities and sororities (Moynihan et al., 2011), athletic teams (Moynihan et al., 2010), and other affinity groups (Elias-Lambert and Black, 2015). The emerging literature on community accountability (Russo, 2018; Kaba, 2021; brown 2017) suggests that this emphasis within CSV prevention that targets specific groups (intended to focus on ‘high risk’ groups) may inadvertently reproduce and perpetuate structural inequities and oppressions that we seek to dismantle. Drawing from intersectional

activism, Russo proposes that anti-racist practices that intentionally center the margins, promote community organizing and coalition building, and explicitly create space to recognize and analyze power and privilege are critical to anti-violence efforts. This emphasis on recognizing interlocking systems of oppression and focusing on skills building in community organizing for college students, faculty, and staff may offer critical pathways forward for enhancing community capacity to address CSV.

From Security and Surveillance to Anti-Carceral Responses and Community Supporting

An additional underlying concern with bystanding intervention programs as currently implemented is the potential for increasing surveillance and security by emphasizing ‘intervening’ in response to undesired behaviors in isolation from the unintended consequences of such intervention (Banyard and Hamby, 2022). As noted above, carceral responses (including mandatory reporting of sexual misconduct) may deepen inequities on campuses, further isolating, marginalizing, and harming those who have the least power and privilege. Although the emphasis on holding those who are using violence accountable is paramount, feminist accountability (as described by Russo, 2018; Kaba, 2021) is not only about individual orientation, assessment, and enforcement but also about community engagement, collaboration, and connection. Holland and colleagues argue for a shift to mandatory supporting policies that center survivor autonomy and consent. This is especially critical for students who experience marginalization, who are intimately familiar with over policing, racial profiling, gendered stereotypes, and police brutality, and therefore, much less likely to disclose exposure to or witnessing of CSV (Holland et al., 2021). Transformative and healing justice frameworks call for anti-racism and racial equity as well as diversity, inclusion, and cultural relevance. Accountability is about both analyzing the “nets” that (re)produce the status quo (Hollander, 2013; Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009) and transforming those nets by imagining and building relationships and trust within and across the campus community differently and collaboratively (Richie, 2012; Russo, 2018).

Healing centered approaches, also called radical healing (French et al., 2020), center experiences of marginalization and racism and lift up community responsibility in promoting healing. Ginwright describes healing centered engagement as one that “views trauma not simply as an individual isolated experience, but rather highlights how trauma and healing are experienced collectively” (Ginwright, 2018). Specifically, CSV prevention, using a healing centered lens, may create opportunities to promote co-learning about history, collective experiences of trauma, and the ability of college students, faculty, staff, administrators, and community

partners to all be part of the solution. Healing centered interventions include ensuring all students can access affirmative spaces where their identity, culture, and history are celebrated, and fostering trusted relationships and multiple supportive spaces to reflect on diversity, history, and common humanity. Simultaneously, healing centered approaches ensure that all students (regardless of disclosures of exposure to violence) receive information about relevant resources and services that are inclusive, accessible and culturally responsive, connecting them to vital supports including advocates and related confidential services, and nurturing students as leaders and advocates to challenge patriarchy and related oppression. Moreover, healing centered approaches seek to address and redress harm without appealing to punitive surveillance or reinforcing police power and presence (Davis et al., 2022; Kaba, 2021). Such intentional efforts around imagining safe, supportive, healing-centered campus communities that encourage moving beyond simple binaries of victim vs. perpetrator as well as danger vs. safety merit consideration and rigorous evaluation.

Recommendations for CSV Policy and Practice Transformation

We return, then, to our university Chancellor’s grand challenge and our own pragmatic explorations to consider within our own university community a ‘community-driven’ solution that centers the experiences, analyses, and activism of Black, Indigenous, and other women of color, students and youth, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and gender non-conforming people (LGBTQI+), as well as students with disabilities. The Chancellor’s office funded several exploratory studies on campus (supplemented with extramural research funds) to begin the process of listening to and learning from students from these diverse and intersectional groups. In parallel, another group of undergraduate students led the development of a survey about experiences with the Title IX office to guide continued refinement of the role of the Title IX office and recommendations for optimizing survivor-centered CSV interventions. Opportunities to hear from students from multiply marginalized groups have underscored the extent to which CSV prevention feels like ‘a joke,’ reinforces experiences of invisibility and erasure, and confirms that resources and services are not responsive to their lived experiences (Chugani et al., 2020). Listening to students’ experiences has also highlighted the need to create learning for the entire campus community about oppression while simultaneously not further burdening students from marginalized groups to have to educate the campus community.

Although not an exhaustive list, the following are intended as some preliminary recommendations for practitioners, advocates, and administrators on college campuses

to consider as we re-envision bystanding in CSV prevention that promotes community accountability and transformative justice:

1. Encourage collaboration across higher education institutions in asking the federal Department of Education and Office on Civil Rights to broaden the accountability, education, and prevention aspects of the statutory mandate of the Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act – while acknowledging the dilemmas of relying on campus security bureaucracies for transformative change. This suggestion broadens the definition of community and expands the “ecology” in terms of coalitions for change and policy-level change. Although this risks reproducing carceral logics of the Act, the next recommendations and insights from above principles increase the likelihood of coalition partners’ ability to strategize around the “frenemies” logic of legislative and administrative organizing (see Whittier, 2018).
2. Emphasize the civil rights framing of race, gender, and disability as well sexual violence and harassment (Bonomi, 2018; Rothman, 2018). The lure of carceral feminism and racialized and gendered double standards of criminalization, surveillance, impunity, and complicity are embedded in current CSV prevention programs that rely heavily on bystander-oriented approaches. By confronting the limitations of a focus on descriptive norms, gender neutral, and universalist approaches, advocates and researchers can direct attention and resources to intersectional queer, anti-racist, youth-led activism (including efforts not solely focused on CSV prevention) and focus on co-creating transformative prevention programs. What this may look like practically speaking could begin with seeking opportunities to share the stories of those experiencing layers of marginalization, working with students to safely and meaningfully share their stories with other students, faculty, staff, and administrators. Such work of listening must be guided by people with marginalized identities such that they are not bearing the burden of having to educate those in our communities about the impacts of power and privilege.
3. Incorporate insights from feminist self-defense and global programs engaging communities in gender transformative work about shifting “nets of accountability” through which people and institutions produce, position, and police differences and hierarchies of race, gender, and ability. This includes viewing and practicing “intervention” (by “bystanders” or anyone else) not as event-based and attitude-driven but as institutional and therefore driven by rules, routines, rhetoric, and opportunities to disrupt structural inequities. Translating to practice, such activities might include creating spaces that respect privacy and anonymity for those who have been harmed

to share their stories and assessments of what has been helpful and what has been unhelpful or even harmful. Stories and insights from our unique campuses can guide our learning and action. This may also mean reviewing all existing prevention programs and student support services for inclusive practices, accessibility, and relevance, continuously centering the margins in the process.

4. Work with student activists and leaders, especially those who benefit from power and privilege, to document and reflect on the ways masculine privilege, white supremacy, and cisheteronormativity are among the salient principles of the social organization of the *status quo*. By challenging the social organization of individual, interactional, and institutional behaviors like victimization, perpetration, bystanding, and mandatory reporting as well as what it means to feel safe, respected, and supported within a campus community, possibilities emerge for different ways of imagining campus communities that are committed to transformative justice. For practitioners, this means aligning CSV prevention with other efforts on college campuses to build anti-racist, accessible, and more inclusive environments and to examine policies and practices (including prevention programs) that reproduce such privilege.
5. Co-create a healing-centered campus environment and practices by insisting on anti-carceral approaches and mandatory supporting of survivors that emphasizes autonomy and consent. Transformative justice frameworks that emphasize collective healing create opportunities for building safer, supportive campuses for all. Recognizing that far too many college students arrive to college campuses having experienced multiple forms of violence victimization and discrimination, maximizing support for survivors (including multiple formal and informal portals for learning about support and enabling receipt of relevant services without resorting to punitive surveillance and policing) must guide all CSV prevention. Co-creating with survivors college campuses that nurture healing and recovery is one of the key steps in re-envisioning CSV prevention.

Conclusions

We call for re-envisioning U.S. bystander prevention programs on college campuses. A shift away from universalist, gender neutral, normative approaches to those that draw on transformative anti-carceral commitments to gender equity and racial justice centers the experiences of those most marginalized and minoritized and challenges continued reliance on surveillance and discipline in prevention of sexual violence on college campuses. We seek to continually reflect and evaluate while working to bolster bystander programs

as part of a strengths-based prevention portfolio (Banyard & Hamby, 2022) with community accountability and transformative justice at the core. We are just beginning this journey within our own university community, and we encourage our colleagues who work within and in collaboration with college campuses to enter into this dialogue with us so that together we can develop, implement, and evaluate truly “community-driven” prevention interventions.

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