

THE MEDIA EDUCATION FOUNDATION PRESENTS

Featuring JACKSON KATZ

THE BYSTANDER MOMENT

Transforming Rape Culture at its Roots

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Written by Loretta Alper & Jeremy Earp

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A Note on This Guide

This guide is designed to help teachers and screening organizers engage the issues presented in the video *The Bystander Moment*, featuring Jackson Katz. It begins with a set of general discussion questions designed to help open up conversation before screening the video, then provides a series of key summary points, discussion questions, and writing assignments for each section of the video.

We've organized this guide by section to make it easier for you to engage the details of the video. For each section, you'll find key points to help you and your students recall specific details during discussions and writing assignments. You'll find discussion questions designed to inspire critical thinking and open-ended conversation about the video's specific arguments. And you'll also find writing assignments that require students to do further research and deepen their thinking about some of the major issues raised by Katz in the video.

The overall goal of this guide is to help you initiate and facilitate open-ended discussions – and formulate writing assignments – that remain focused on the concrete issues and arguments raised by Jackson Katz in *The Bystander Moment*.

Synopsis

The #MeToo movement has shined much-needed light on the pervasiveness of sexual violence and created unprecedented demand for gender violence prevention approaches that actually work. *The Bystander Moment* tells the story of one of the most prominent and proven of these approaches—the innovative bystander model developed by pioneering anti-violence activist and writer Jackson Katz and his colleagues. At its core, the video explores the role of bystanders—especially friends, teammates, classmates, and co-workers—in perpetuating sexual harassment, sexual assault, and other forms of gender violence. Katz gives special attention to peer culture dynamics—especially male peer culture dynamics across race and ethnicity—that help to normalize sexism and misogyny while silencing other men in the face of abuse. He also stresses the crucial importance of appealing to people not as potential perpetrators or passive spectators, but as active bystanders and potential leaders who have a positive role to play in challenging and changing the sexist cultural norms that too often lead to gender violence.

About Jackson Katz

Jackson Katz, Ph.D., is internationally renowned for his pioneering scholarship and activism on issues of gender, race, and violence. He has long been a major figure and thought leader in the growing global movement of men working to promote gender equality and prevent gender violence. He is co-founder of Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP), one of the longest-running and most widely influential gender violence prevention programs in North America, and the first major program of its kind in the sports culture and the military. Katz was one of the key architects of the now broadly popular "bystander" approach that MVP introduced to the sexual assault and relationship abuse fields. Since 1997 he has run MVP Strategies, which provides sexual harassment and gender violence prevention/leadership training to institutions in the public and private sectors in the U.S. and around the world.

Pre-viewing Discussion Questions

To get a discussion going before showing the video, ask students or members of your screening audience any or all of the following questions:

1. Have you ever heard of “bystander intervention?” If so, how does it apply to sexual harassment, sexual assault, and other forms of gender violence?
2. Have you ever heard of the “bystander effect”? What is your understanding of that social psychological concept?
3. In your view, what role should friends, teammates, classmates and co-workers play when it comes to situations of gender violence that involve members of their peer cultures?
4. What do you understand the concept of “prevention” to mean in relation to sexual harassment and abuse? Can you think of any specific rape prevention campaigns, for example? If so, describe their typical focus.
5. What does the term “rape culture mean”? It’s become a highly contentious term and has received a lot of blowback, especially on college campuses. What do you think the term is meant to convey and why do you think it receives such fierce blowback?
6. In your view, are rape and battering and other forms of gender violence usually seen as women’s issues or as men’s issues? Either way, why do you think this is and what does it say?
7. What role can men play in preventing rape and other forms of sexual violence and harassment? Do you think men have any kind of special responsibility to join in the effort to prevent sexual violence? If so, why? If not, why not?
8. Do you think there are times, and contexts, when men could possibly be *more* effective than women in helping to prevent gender violence? Or is it your sense that it’d be best for gender violence prevention efforts to either keep the focus on women or to remain gender neutral?
9. Have you ever participated in any gender violence, bullying, or sexual harassment prevention training programs? If so, how effective were they? In what ways do you think they might have been more effective?

10. What kind of impact do you think the #MeToo movement has had on the public discussion around sexual harassment and abuse? Do you feel it's helped clarify where education efforts need to focus?
11. Do you think the #MeToo movement has helped shine a light on the role of bystanders in the perpetuation of sexual harassment and abuse? If so, can you give any specific examples?

I. Introduction

Key Points

- Katz opens by discussing how the #MeToo movement has built on a half century of anti-sexist activism by women and helped bring sexual assault into the public conversation like never before.
- The #MeToo movement has not only shined a spotlight on perpetrators of sexual violence, Katz says, but also on all the people around perpetrators who have remained silent in the face of abuse.
- As a result, he says, there's been an emerging discussion about how individual *bystanders* – and the wider *culture* more generally – perpetuate sexual harassment and sexual violence.
- Katz concludes his introduction by pointing out that while the role of the bystander has been studied for years in the gender violence prevention field, some bystander-based approaches are far more effective and transformative than others.

II. Thinking Beyond the “Bystander Effect”

Key Points

- Discussions of the role of bystanders in the prevention of violence usually conjure up memories of the Kitty Genovese murder case in 1964, which involved scores of bystanders who allegedly saw the attack unfold on the streets of New York and chose to do nothing.
- The Genovese case is widely credited with launching a body of research into what sociologists and psychologists to this day call the “bystander effect.”
- The “bystander effect” is a social-psychological concept that describes the different reasons people fail to intervene when they witness an act of violence or see someone in distress, from believing other people will take care of the situation to fearing for their own safety.
- Katz argues that the problem with applying “bystander effect” research to gender violence is that most of this research focuses on how people behave when they come across acts of violence or distress involving *strangers* on the street; in contrast, he says, most cases of sexual harassment and abuse play out within *known* peer cultures.
- The key question when it comes to gender violence, according to Katz, isn’t why people don’t act in the face of violence or distress among strangers on the street, but why they don’t act when they witness harassment and abuse within their own peer cultures – in other words, when they’re with their friends, teammates, classmates, and co-workers.
- According to Katz, fear is indeed central to why people don’t step up to prevent gender violence within peer cultures – but he argues that it has less to do with physical fear than with *social* fear.
- Especially within male cultures, he argues, men often don’t speak up because they’re afraid of the *social* consequences of doing so – especially the fear that they might be seen as soft, weak, or not “one of the guys.”

- Katz points to gang rapes as one of the most disturbing and extreme manifestations of these common dynamics, pointing out how young men often go along with gang rapes or remain silent out of fear of losing status within their peer cultures.
- Katz argues that the bystander approach, if done well, needs to focus explicitly on helping people – especially men – to break their “complicit silence” about all forms of gender violence.
- While older educational efforts around sexual violence tended to focus almost exclusively on how women could reduce their risk of being assaulted, or how boys and men could avoid being perpetrators, Katz calls for breaking out of the perpetrator-victim binary altogether and focusing instead on the positive role that men – and women – can play in preventing gender violence.

II. Thinking Beyond the “Bystander Effect”

Discussion Questions

1. In Katz’s view, why are most discussions about the “bystander effect” out of step with the role of bystanders in most cases of sexual harassment and abuse?
2. What are some of the reasons Katz gives for why people don’t intervene in or interrupt sexual harassment or sexist behavior in social situations? What reasons does he give for men and young men, in particular?
3. Why does Katz say that gang rape often involves some of the same dynamics that are at work with other, less extreme forms of sexual harassment and sexual abuse?
4. Why does Katz say violence and abuse create a culture of silence not only around victims but also around perpetrators? What does he mean when he says “complicit silence”?
5. Where does the focus of bystander education need to be, according to Katz, in order to break men’s complicit silence?

II. Thinking Beyond the “Bystander Effect”

Assignments

1. Research the Kitty Genovese murder case of 1964. Then research online news stories that mention the Genovese case and the “bystander effect” in their coverage of *more recent* violent incidents. Write a paper exploring how the writers of these pieces use the Genovese case and the “bystander effect” in their reporting with Katz’s analysis and critique of the “bystander effect” in mind.
2. Research the Big Dan’s rape case in New Bedford, Mass. Write a paper summarizing what happened, with special focus on the male peer culture dynamics that were at work during the assault. Be sure to use Katz’s analysis of bystander behavior in the video to help explain and explore these dynamics.

III. The MVP Bystander Approach

Key Points

- In the early 1990s, Katz conceived of and co-founded the Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) program at The Center for the Study of Sport in Society at Northeastern University.
- The Center had been created years before with the idea of using the sports culture to help fight injustice and a range of other social problems, inspired by the long history of prominent activist-athletes like Muhammad Ali, Jackie Robinson, and Billie Jean King.
- Katz's goal was to build on the work of the Center and the legacy of activist-athletes by creating a program that would inspire male athletes in positions of leadership to help fight sexism and men's violence against women. The result was the MVP bystander approach to gender violence prevention.
- In developing this approach, Katz drew inspiration from the bystander-based, anti-violence work that was being done by researcher Ron Slaby and his colleagues, who at the time were focusing on the positive and proactive role bystanders could play within their peer cultures to prevent bullying in schools.
- With this same basic focus on bystanders within peer groups – in other words, the friends, teammates, classmates, and co-workers within any given peer culture – the MVP program focused on training athletes on college campuses to become leaders in gender violence prevention education.
- MVP's initial focus was geared toward activating men, in particular, in an attempt to change the social norms within male peer cultures that underlie abusive behaviors.
- In the program's second year, the model started focusing on women as bystanders well – not as the victims or potential victims of harassment, abuse, or violence, and not as the perpetrators, but as potential leaders on these issues in their peer groups.

- Katz stresses that MVP was also mindful from the start about the need for an “intersectional” approach to working within peer groups, meaning the ways that race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual identity can shape the dynamics within any given peer group.
- One of the key differences between the MVP approach and other “bystander intervention” models to this day is that it doesn’t just focus on prevention at the point of attack. Instead, MVP focuses on challenging and changing the underlying attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that are often at the foundation of sexual harassment and violence.
- In other words, instead of focusing on what to do whenever an actual incident of abuse arises, Katz emphasizes the importance of talking honestly and openly about the underlying *social norms* that contribute to these problems in the first place.

III. The MVP Bystander Approach

Discussion Questions

1. Why did Katz think it would be effective to develop a gender violence prevention program within the sports culture?
2. According to Katz, what was missing from the sexual assault prevention efforts of the 1970s and '80s?
3. Why was the work of Ron Slaby and his colleagues important to the development of the MVP bystander approach?
4. Katz points out that a lot of “bystander intervention” training focuses on the “point of attack”. What does he mean by that? And why does he think it’s insufficient?
5. Why did Katz and his colleagues initially focus solely on males? What analogy does he make to race to explain their thinking?
6. When the program branched out in its second year and started focusing on women as well, what was the approach to women?
7. What does the term “intersectional” mean? In your view, why is it important – or not – for a gender violence prevention program like MVP to be attentive to differences not only between men and women, but also across race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual identity?
8. How does Katz actually seem to define “bystanders”? Is this different from most people’s sense of what a bystander is? If so, do you think this difference is important?
9. What is the overall goal of the MVP bystander approach, according to Katz?

III. The MVP Bystander Approach

Assignments

1. Research the history of rape prevention efforts since the emergence of the women's movement in the 1960s. Watch archival educational films from the 1970s and '80s online, look up print and other media campaigns, read articles, and pay careful attention to what all of these educational efforts focused on. Then write a paper exploring how gender violence prevention strategies – and the public discussion around sexual assault – have evolved (or not) over time. Use Katz's analysis in *The Bystander Moment* to help illustrate and clarify your points.
2. Anti-bullying programs are typically aimed at young children, but Katz and his colleagues found that many of the central concepts of the anti-bullying programs pioneered by Dr. Ron Slaby and others offered important insights for the gender violence prevention work they were developing. Research the anti-bullying programs developed by Slaby and his colleagues and write a paper comparing their core concepts to the core concepts of MVP detailed by Katz in *The Bystander Moment*.

IV. Transforming Rape Culture

Key Points

- In contrast to the old idea that individual perpetrators of sexual violence are abnormal outliers who seem to come out of nowhere, Katz uses the concept of “rape culture” to make the case that perpetrators are always acting within the larger context of social and cultural *norms*.
- Katz uses a pyramid to illustrate the cluster of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that he says lay at the foundation of so many acts of abuse – and he stresses that gender violence prevention efforts need to target the base of the pyramid rather than just the act of abuse at the tip of the pyramid.
- Katz also uses the pyramid to show that rape is on the extreme end of a continuum of behaviors, including pervasive catcalls on the street, groping, unwanted touch on public transportation, victim-blaming, revenge porn, and rampant misogynistic trolling and bullying online as traditional peer cultures have expanded from physical space into cyberspace.
- Katz concludes the section by arguing that any attempt to transform the sexist and misogynistic attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of the rape culture needs to come to grips with the cultural ideologies of *manhood* that reinforce abusive behaviors while rendering other men silent in the face of this abuse.

IV. Transforming Rape Culture

Discussion Questions

1. According to Katz, what is “rape culture” and how does it relate to the work of MVP?
2. What does it mean to intervene in rape culture and not simply at the “point of attack”?
3. Describe what Katz calls “the base” of the gender violence pyramid. What is the difference between the base and the tip of the pyramid?
4. According to Katz, why don’t more people intervene at the base of the pyramid? What makes it more difficult at times to do so?
5. What are some of the behaviors on the continuum of rape culture that Katz talks about? Can you think of others?
6. What are some of the examples radio host Charlamagne Tha God gives to substantiate his belief that he was brought up in “rape culture”?
7. What is “gender transformative” education and programming? How does masculinity fit into it? Why does Katz believe it’s the most effective way to prevent gender violence? And what do you think Katz means by “transformative” education in the first place? In other words, transformative education as opposed to what other kind of education?
8. What does Katz mean by “cultural ideologies of manhood”? And why does he say they need to be placed at the center of bystander education efforts that aim to prevent gender violence?
9. According to Katz, why are so many “bystander intervention” programs reluctant to focus on gender, especially cultural ideas about manhood?
10. What are some of the talking points commonly used to dismiss and ridicule the very idea of rape culture? What do you make of these dismissals?

IV. Transforming Rape Culture

Assignments

1. Charlamagne Tha God cites a number of examples from pop culture to explain why he's convinced he grew up in "rape culture." If you're in agreement with him, write a paper citing other examples from entertainment culture – from the past and/or present – that support what he's saying. If you don't agree with him, instead write a paper explaining why. Either way, be sure to summarize Charlamagne's main points before making your own case. And also, be sure to refer to Katz's analysis of "rape culture" (especially the pyramid illustration) to help advance your argument.
2. The idea that we live in a "rape culture" has been vehemently rejected by some people. One of many examples is the article "It's Time to End Rape Culture Hysteria."

The article can be found online here:

<http://time.com/30545/its-time-to-end-rape-culture-hysteria/>

Write a paper responding to this argument that there's no such thing as "rape culture." In your response, summarize the writer's main argument, then lay out a careful case for why you agree or disagree with it. Be sure to use *specific* examples from *The Bystander Moment* to either challenge or support the writer's central arguments. And be sure to address how this paragraph, in particular, fits with Katz's own description of rape culture:

Tolerance for rape? Rape is a horrific crime, and rapists are despised. We have strict laws that Americans want to see enforced. Though rape is certainly a serious problem, there's no evidence that it's considered a cultural norm. Twenty-first century America does not have a rape culture; what we have is an out-of-control lobby leading the public and our educational and political leaders down the wrong path. Rape-culture theory is doing little to help victims, but its power to poison the minds of young women and lead to hostile environments for innocent males is immense.

3. *The Bystander Moment* shows a clip from the series *13 Reasons Why* and the film *Unfriended* to illustrate Katz's point that misogyny and bullying online have become so pervasive that they're now a common theme in programming to young people. Write a paper examining how online misogyny is represented in popular culture, and pay special attention to how the role of bystanders gets framed. Be sure to refer to Katz's arguments in *The Bystander Moment*, where appropriate, as you advance your analysis of how bystanders are represented in these programs or films.

V. Redefining Manhood

Key Points

- According to Katz, American culture, especially entertainment culture in the U.S., has normalized and glamorized a definition of manhood that equates being a real man with dominance, sexual conquest, the objectification of women, and having sex with as many women as possible.
- At the same time, Katz argues, it's been the cultural norm to question the masculinity of guys who don't demonstrate these qualities and to make them seem abnormal or somehow less than a real man.
- Katz then argues that these attitudes extend beyond popular culture into the political culture, circulating everywhere from cable news networks to the White House itself.
- He uses the example of Donald Trump not only to point out the normalization of sexism and misogyny, but also to show how even the most powerful men can be cowed into silence in the face of this abuse.
- Katz explains that MVP sessions explore how the same gender norms – and power dynamics – that are at work in popular culture and our political culture also operate within *peer cultures*.

V. Redefining Manhood

Discussion Questions

1. According to Katz, what image of manhood has popular culture normalized and glamorized over the years? Do you think that image has changed at all over time? If so, would you say that the more regressive styles of manhood that Katz discusses have faded or become even more pervasive and intense in response to these changes?
2. Describe Fox News's portrayal of so-called "alpha" and "beta" males. Do you think this mentality has an effect on the way Fox News and other self-described conservative media outlets talk about and frame the kind of sexual violence prevention work that feminists and others do on college campuses?
3. How does Katz connect the response by conservative leaders to Donald Trump's treatment of his Republican rivals during the 2016 to his overall analysis of bystander behavior within male peer cultures?
4. Why does Katz say that the image of manhood that circulates in popular culture and political culture is crucial to think about if we want to develop truly transformative approaches to gender violence prevention?

V. Redefining Manhood

Assignments

1. Do some research on conservative arguments about the so-called “feminization” and “wussification” of American men. What do the people advancing these arguments seem to mean by “feminine” and “masculine”? And according to their arguments, how are feminists to blame for the rise of so-called “beta-males,” “soy boys,” “pajama boys,” etc.? Write a paper summarizing these arguments and offering your own take on them.
2. Research the gender gap in the 2016 presidential election, in other words the difference in the percentage of men and women who voted for Donald Trump as opposed to Hillary Clinton. In your research, be sure to pay attention to race and class variables within these numbers. Once you’re familiar with the numbers, write a paper exploring the gender gap – and especially the white male vote –in light of Katz’s analysis of Donald Trump’s public persona and how he campaigned for the presidency.

VI. The Courage to Lead

Key Points

- Katz says the underlying goal of bystander-based gender violence prevention should be changing social norms.
- He points to other ways social norms have changed over time, and says the same is possible when it comes to changing the normative attitudes and behaviors that too often render people, especially men, silent in the face of sexism, misogyny, sexual harassment, and sexual assault.
- At the same time, Katz acknowledges that changing social norms is difficult and often yields fierce blowback.
- He points to the conservative blowback against people actively working to change the rape culture as an example, and directly counters the common argument that challenging regressive and abusive models of masculinity is somehow an attempt to undermine men's strength.
- Far from undermining men's strength, Katz argues, he and his colleagues are trying to define strength differently – as strength of character, moral courage, and having the guts to stand up to bullies and one's peers when necessary.
- It's for this reason that Katz says he sees MVP not as a bystander program at all, but as a gender violence prevention *leadership* program that uses the bystander approach as one of its tools. His point is that a bystander who speaks up – a teammate, a friend, a classmate, or a colleague who interrupts or challenges another person's abusive behavior or even a sexist comment – is actually demonstrating a classic form of leadership.
- Katz uses the example of the Australian Chief of Army, General David Morrison, who made a forceful statement in a video that went viral condemning the behavior of junior officers and enlisted men in the Australian Army who engaged in misogynistic behavior online.

- Katz calls special attention to this statement from Morrison: “The standard you walk past is the standard you accept.” He says that these words capture the essence of the bystander approach.
- Returning to where he began, to the epidemic of complicit silence within peer cultures in the face of sexual harassment and abuse, Katz closes with this quote from Martin Luther King: "In the end, what will hurt the most is not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."

VI. The Courage to Lead

Discussion Questions

1. How would you define social and cultural norms?
2. According to Katz, what can we learn from the public health campaigns to end cigarette smoking and drunk driving?
3. In your view, what does it take to change social and cultural norms? Can you think of examples of norms changing other than the ones Katz cites?
4. Why does Katz say that changing the gender norms that perpetuate silence in the face of sexual violence is more complicated than changing behaviors like smoking and drunk driving?
5. How does Katz define strength – especially *male* strength – and how does it differ from other common definitions of male strength?
6. What does Katz mean when he says that MVP is “a leadership training program that uses the bystander approach as one of its tools”? Why do you think he feels it’s important to make this distinction?
7. How would you translate General David Morrison’s statement that “the standard you walk past is the standard you accept”? What does this mean, exactly, in light of the rest of what Morrison says in his video? And why does Katz say that this statement, in and of itself, is Morrison’s “articulation of the bystander approach”?
8. How does the Martin Luther King quote that Katz cites at the end of the film apply more generally to the MVP approach to preventing gender violence?

VI. The Courage to Lead

Assignments

1. Watch this video about the MVP program:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nqjRLTO1Fcw&t=4s>

Then watch this bystander training video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=491e8Oku0Jw>

Write a paper talking about any similarities and differences you see between these two programs. In your view, what are the pros and cons of each approach? Be sure to refer to specific examples from *The Bystander Moment* to help clarify your analysis.

2. Look up the definition of the word “strength” in multiple sources. Then research video clips and articles from Fox News online that make the case that feminism and “political correctness” are undermining men’s strength. Write a paper giving your take on how these personalities on Fox News seem to be defining “strength.” Be sure to provide your own definition of “strength” based on the definitions you looked up, and also be sure to summarize the arguments made on Fox News on this issue, before providing your own analysis.
3. Katz makes the case that the overall goal of bystander education should be to help people break their “complicit silence.” Write a paper explaining what you think he means, and giving your own take on the role silence plays in the perpetuation of gender violence. Be sure to refer to specific examples from *The Bystander Moment* to help illustrate and support your own points.