

CONSENT, POWER, AND ABUSE [2]

THE ROLES OF ENABLERS, APOLOGISTS
AND BYSTANDERS IN MAINTAINING
ABUSIVE GROUP DYNAMICS

INTRODUCTION

This is the second in a series of documents by Wilrieke Sophia and Rupert James Alison intended to encourage awareness of unhealthy and abusive power dynamics in groups. Shocking stories continue to emerge from all kinds of organisations where people in power have bullied, sexually harassed or assaulted those beneath them in the group hierarchy. Examples include churches, businesses, sports teams, media organisations - and also many schools of embodied spirituality and personal development. Listening to these stories, it becomes apparent that the same unhealthy power dynamics - from the relatively minor to the seriously abusive - are played out again and again in different organisations.

THE VULNERABILITY OF HEALING

People usually come to workshop spaces to learn, heal and develop self-awareness, by opening themselves up to new practices and experiences. Such work can be extremely powerful and valuable. However, this opening up requires vulnerability and trust, and if it is taken advantage of by those setting themselves up as authority figures, it can be an especially bitter betrayal. Instead of healing, there may be (re-)traumatisation.

SCOPE

When we understand the different roles people can play in power dynamics and our own responses to them, we can take better care of our wellbeing.

Our first document introduced a series of coloured flags (red, orange, yellow and green) to indicate a range of healthy and unhealthy power dynamics - particularly as found in schools of yoga, (neo-)tantra, sexuality, and spirituality. **In this second document, we turn our attention to the other key elements in maintaining unhealthy group dynamics - the roles of enablers, apologists and bystanders.**

ENABLERS, APOLOGISTS AND BYSTANDERS

People can find themselves acting as enablers, apologists or bystanders of abusive behaviour in many different kinds of situations, including:

- witnessing a one-off incident in the street
- on social media
- within relationships and families
- within large organisations

In the kinds of groups we are focusing on, these dynamics may be even more likely to occur, because:

- There is usually a **hierarchical power structure** in which the head teacher has (far) more social power than the students.
- Students highly value what they are learning in the group, providing a **strong motivation not to 'rock the boat'**.
- The practices often take students into **altered states of consciousness** (e.g. through lack of food, sleep, or privacy and high-intensity exercises), in which it can be difficult to identify or call out abuse.
- The practices often involve **physical touch**, sometimes intimate touch, and it may not be straightforward to establish consent within a learning environment of unequal power.

THE ROLES: AN OVERVIEW

Enablers, apologists and bystanders can be viewed **within a hierarchy of abusive group dynamics**, with abusers at the 'top', as follows:

Abusers

Group leaders and teachers who harm some or all of their group members. The abuse may be physical, sexual, emotional, financial, spiritual or all of these.

Enablers

People who actively support abusers in their actions, but do not directly abuse others themselves.

Apologists

People who verbally defend abusers by denying, excusing or justifying the abuse.

Bystanders

Passive witnesses who don't support or defend the abuse, but nor do they do or say anything to try and prevent it.

Targets

Also known as victims or survivors, these are people who are directly abused by those in positions of power. Enablers, apologists and bystanders often play a role in maintaining this abuse.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Some authors define these terms in slightly different ways. For example, we use the word ‘target’ here as a neutral term, rather than imposing a particular identity or more loaded term onto those who have been harmed (e.g. that they are a ‘victim’ or they are a ‘survivor’.) **People who have been harmed can of course claim whichever of these identities most closely matches their personal experience.**

Similarly, some educators refer to ‘a person who has abused’ rather than ‘an abuser’, to label the behaviour, rather than the person. In this document, we use terms like ‘abuser’ or ‘enabler’ as a shorthand to describe a person who has exhibited such behaviours.

Multiple roles at once

Each of the five categories refers to a different role, rather than to different kinds of people. An individual might carry out more than one of these roles at any one time, or at different times. For example:

- An abusive teacher may also act as an apologist for another abusive teacher.
- Targets of an abusive group leader may also be bystanders of the abuse of other members
- Someone may be an enabler within a group, and after they have left, become an apologist for the group on public forums where the group leaders are being called out for historical abuse.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RECOGNISING DIFFERENT ROLES

Sometimes bystanders and enablers are fully aware of the scale of abuse that is happening, while in other situations they may not be. Some might not be aware of the abuse they've been complicit in until after they have left a group. Recognising that we ourselves have acted as an enabler, apologist or bystander of abuse can be very challenging to come to terms with.

Our experience is that being able to recognise these dynamics is invaluable for anyone involved in a purpose-driven, hierarchical organisation - particularly the organisations we are considering here: unregulated structures whose practices often work with the vulnerabilities of students' own bodies and psyches. Our hope is that with greater awareness, people can feel safe enough to experience the profound benefits of many of these practices, while better protecting themselves and each other from systemic harm.

As with our previous document, **this is not intended as a definitive or exhaustive list of these dynamics**. Rather, our hope is to increase awareness and offer a reflection for anyone who is now or might later become involved in such groups, including group leaders, facilitators and their assistants.

Each of the following sections - on enablers, apologists and bystanders - is presented in three parts:

- **WHAT does it look like in practice?**
- **WHY do people behave in this way?**
- **HOW might people be supported to behave differently?**

We conclude with two sections of resources with suggestions for support for those who have been harmed, and further information for those who would like to know more about these dynamics

ENABLERS

**People who actively support abusers in their actions,
but do not directly abuse others themselves.**

WHAT does it look like in practice?

Enabling is most commonly described in the context of domestic violence, where enablers are often close friends or family members of the abuser and their target. In this context, enablers typically support abusive behaviour by:

- unquestionably accepting the abuser's version of reality
- telling targets that their abuse is their own fault (victim blaming)
- hiding or tidying up the abuser's messes and inconsistencies

Enabling behaviour can happen on an even greater scale in abusive groups, where a leader may have dozens or even hundreds of enablers. Examples of enabling in a group include:

- **Giving an abuser access to people at high risk of being harmed**, e.g. by actively promoting and supporting their work to new recruits.
- **Pressurising and enthusing wavering students into remaining** in an abusive group
- **Working as a co-teacher, assistant, or organiser to an abuser**. Here, not only are they supplying their labour, but they may also lend their good reputation to the group, wrongly implying to potential students that it is a trustworthy organisation.
- **Silencing the voices of those who are trying to speak about the abuse**. This might include making threats to people inside and outside the organisation, removing critical public feedback/reviews, or closing down comments on social media to people outside the organisation.
- **Escorting or trafficking targets to a leader's dwelling or bedroom**, knowing or suspecting they will be abused when they get there.
- **Choosing to believe an abuser whilst disbelieving those they have harmed** to protect the reputation of the group.
- **Senior students who leave their abusive teacher when a scandal becomes public**, but then go on to set themselves up as teachers using exactly the same practices and teaching methods, without acknowledging their enabling role in the previous abuse.

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Flying Monkey describes a type of enabler groomed by the abuser to abuse others on their behalf. Their actions are also called abuse by proxy. The term was coined after the flying monkeys in the Wizard of Oz which were under the spell of the Wicked Witch of the East, to do her bidding against Dorothy and her friends.

Perhaps it's unfortunate that this phrase has become widely used – the unpleasant and non-human image it evokes may make it more difficult for people who have behaved in this way to accept and acknowledge their role. Nevertheless, it's a dynamic which is worth being aware of.

Examples include:

- Befriending and empathising with a target of abuse, encouraging them to share their thoughts and feelings with them in an unguarded way, then **taking this information back to the abuser who will later use it to emotionally manipulate the target.**
- Stalking or spying on targets and their friends/family and passing the information back to the abuser.
- Rigorously **defending the abuser in (online) discussions while attacking or spreading untrue gossip about targets** and their allies. This can include publicly misrepresenting the target's words and actions.
- Deliberately **provoking a target with false accusations** in an attempt to get an angry reaction from them. They will then use this as 'proof' that the target is 'crazy' and 'abusive'.

The above techniques can be used to create **DARVO**: "Deny; Attack; Reverse Victim and Offender". DARVO is widely used by perpetrators and people around them to deflect responsibility for their actions. They **deny** the abuse ever took place, **attack** the person that was abused for attempting to hold them accountable, then claim the abuser is actually the victim in the situation, **reversing** the roles of **victim** and **offender**. DARVO often includes victim blaming and gas-lighting.

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WHY do people behave in this way?

Abusive leaders often put people under huge pressure to become enablers. Not only does it help them increase their power, but **when enablers start to feel complicit in the abuse, it becomes harder for them to call it out.** When targets of abuse see their abuse being normalised by enablers, they become less likely to challenge it themselves.

Experts on domestic abuse say that people can become enablers for a complex mixture of reasons, including a misguided sense of care-taking for the abuser, self-doubt, fear, and a desire for power-by-association. **People tend to become enablers gradually, often without fully understanding the dynamics they are being sucked into.** They may mistakenly believe that they alone can understand and help their difficult but special partner or teacher. It has been suggested that some enablers may see abusive dynamics as normal if they grew up with neglectful or abusive caregivers themselves.

Further reasons why people might become enablers in group situations include:

- Their **social and professional status within the group or continued membership** within it depends on them supporting the group leader without question. This may also tap into a deep-seated fear of rejection/abandonment.
- They may **not be fully aware that abuse is happening.** Perhaps something feels a bit 'off', but they can't say exactly what. So they focus on the good that they see happening and ignore their feelings of unease.
- **They have been abused by the leader themselves, but are in denial about that.** They therefore also need to maintain their denial about the abuse that is happening to others.

In schools with a spiritual element, enablers can easily become convinced that they are supporting the targets' spiritual growth, rather than supporting their abuse. **Abuse is often re-framed as an advanced spiritual teaching which ordinary people wouldn't understand, or else as heart-warming evidence that the wonderful spiritual teacher is "only human".**

ENABLERS

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HOW might people be supported to behave differently?

Typically, people become enablers after having been involved in an abusive organisation for a while, by which time it can be difficult to extricate themselves from the group's worldview.

One method can be to **show them examples of enabling in other, similar groups, to which they have no personal connection.** Key to any such process is acknowledging that enablers have probably themselves been coerced and gaslit into behaving as they did. It may help to know that what happened to them wasn't unique but is a widespread dynamic. In due course, they may be able to make amends to those they have harmed, though it can take a long time before both parties feel ready for this.

When many people have left an abusive group or teacher, there may come a time when they can speak together of their shared experience of enabling, to help come to terms with their experience.

Probably the **most effective way to avoid becoming an enabler is to become educated about unhealthy group dynamics before taking on any role supporting a powerful group leader.** And also being prepared to directly challenge or walk away from any group or teacher displaying them.

Unfortunately, this isn't always easy. People are often drawn to teachers and groups in the first place because they have unresolved trauma patterns they are seeking healing for. Unscrupulous or ignorant teachers play into these wounds to gain power for themselves, in the disguise of offering healing.

APOLOGISTS

People who verbally defend abusers by denying, excusing or justifying the abuse.

WHAT does it look like in practice?

The list below gives some **paraphrased examples of denials, excuses and justifications used by apologists of abusive yoga, tantra, sexuality and spirituality groups**. They can sound convincing because the apologists who use them have often been deceived by the group into believing they are real. They are used both within groups, to try and prevent people from leaving, and also to outsiders, to help maintain the group's reputation.

Seeing these fake justifications for what they are can help people break free of abusive groups, and can also help hold abusive leaders to account. **We have heard examples of all the following being used, some of them many times.** They are paraphrased here in a way to highlight the deceit involved:

IT'S ALL ABOUT ME:

"I personally found this teacher to be wonderful, and my personal experience is more important than anything anyone else might say about him, including their experiences of abuse."

VICTIM BLAMING:

"By accusing our beloved teacher of abuse you are bringing division and discord into a group which was previously all about love and togetherness. You are the problem here."

ROLE REVERSAL:

"When many people accuse the same person of having abused them it's not fair, because there are many of them and only one of him. In fact, the more people who step forward to tell about their experiences of abuse, the less fair it becomes. He's the real victim here."

NOT REPORTED:

"If the victim didn't immediately report the incident to the police, then it didn't happen."

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TONE POLICING:

“Anger is not an appropriate response to sexual abuse and its cover-up. If you can’t talk about it in a calm, ‘spiritual’ way, then don’t speak out at all.”

JUST YOUR TRAUMA:

“It’s sad that you are projecting your unresolved trauma onto our entirely blameless community. We hope you find healing for it soon.”

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS:

“This isn’t an appropriate topic to discuss on a public forum, where others might criticise our responses or hold us accountable. So email us privately and we’ll deal with it in due course... (if we ever get round to it).”

FALSE EQUIVALENCE:

“We all get caught up in perpetrator/victim/rescuer triangles sometimes, and this is just an example of that. Victims of abuse should not speak out, because they are also themselves perpetrators in some other area of life.”

NOT MY PROBLEM:

“Just because I knew this guy was abusing people for a long time, it doesn’t mean I had any responsibility to do or say anything about it. We’re all on our own journey.”

ONLY INTENTIONS MATTER:

“Well, he may have harmed you, but his heart was in the right place, he wanted to help. And only his intentions matter, because actually, this is all about him.”

VICTIM MENTALITY:

“If you speak out in support of someone who has been harmed, you are merely reconfirming their ‘victim’ status. And by doing that, you are disempowering them, not helping them.”

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GASLIGHTING:

“Those who claim this teacher was abusing people don’t understand that in reality he was helping and healing them. They just don’t have enough wisdom or self-awareness to realise that. Which is their fault, not his.”

NOBODY’S PERFECT:

“Well, he may have harmed people, but nobody’s perfect, we’re all flawed. If you expected perfection and put him on a pedestal then that’s on you, not him.”

EXCUSE TO GET ANGRY:

“Stop making such a big deal of it, it wasn’t that bad. You’re the kind of person who’s just looking for an excuse to get angry about something.”

TOO SEXY:

“But the teacher is attractive, and attractive people can have as much consensual sex as they like, so they would never need to force anyone into it. Therefore you must have wanted sex with him really.”

CLASH OF PERSONALITIES

“What happened was just an unfortunate clash of personalities, for which no one is to blame. If you need to leave, then you should do so in silence with your dignity intact.”

JUST GOSSIP:

“All this talk about abuse by the leader is just gossip. And gossiping is an unhealthy and unspiritual thing to do. You should know better. The way to solve this problem is to stop gossiping.”

SPIRITUAL BYPASSING:

“From my exalted spiritual position, I can see that ultimately we’re all one, which means in reality there are no perpetrators or victims. So there’s nothing we need to do here because everything is already perfect. And if you don’t see that, then you’re simply not as enlightened as I am.”

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WHY do people behave in this way?

Apologists' statements like in the examples can be a way of **avoiding the distress of 'cognitive dissonance' - which means holding two contradictory beliefs simultaneously.** The two contradictory beliefs might be "*my teacher is a loving spiritual man who wants the best for everybody*" and "*what I have seen him doing looks like abuse.*" These then get reframed into "*My teacher is a loving spiritual man, therefore whatever he's doing can't possibly be abuse, but must instead be some kind of teaching.*"

If the group teaches yoga or another strong physical practice, then the practice itself can become the main outlet for releasing the internal tensions of cognitive dissonance - thus ensuring **people become even more committed to the group's practices.**

Apologists can also be people who were on the periphery of a group and who genuinely only had good experiences of it. Abusive groups wouldn't attract members if they weren't offering healthy, enjoyable practices plus a deep sense of community and friendship. It's very rare that everyone in a group is abused, and **many people can be left with only positive memories.** Apologists may feel that the accusations of abuse simply do not match their own personal experience of the group. It's perhaps understandable that their first response is to question or minimise any accusations against a beloved teacher.

It is possible for someone to be defending a genuinely blameless leader from false accusations. This does occasionally happen. However, the number of individuals seriously harmed by powerful leaders and their groups is orders of magnitude higher than the number of powerful leaders seriously harmed by false accusations. Hence our focus here is where most harm has occurred and continues to occur. It is also important to note that a skilful way of responding to false accusations of abuse would not be to indulge in the kind of gas-lighting and victim-blaming illustrated in these examples.

APOLOGISTS

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HOW might people be supported to behave differently?

Apologists who have personally had only positive experiences may change their perspective once they hear about the abuse. Apologists who are aware of problematic behaviours within a group but 'reframe' them as teachings, are unlikely to stop being apologists until they leave, or have decided to leave the group. Typically **the more deeply involved someone is, the longer it takes them to see through the levels of deceit involved.** This process may involve any or all of the following:

- **Hearing accusations of abuse have come from multiple people**, rather than just one or two.
- Having an in-depth one-to-one **conversation with someone who was harmed.**
- Gradually **seeing the inconsistencies** in the arguments presented by the group leader.
- Gaining a greater **understanding of abusive dynamics** in principle, as outlined here and in our previous document.
- Having honest and difficult **conversations with other apologists** from the same group, or potentially, from other similar groups.

BYSTANDERS

Passive witnesses who don't support or defend abuse, but nor do they do or say anything to try and prevent it.

WHAT does it look like in practice?

Bystanding is a tendency for people **not to intervene when they witness harassment, bullying or abuse** taking place. It can range from passively witnessing a one-off incident in the street, to being aware of the ongoing abuse of others within a systemically abusive organisation. Some charities offer training to support bystanders to speak out when they witness sexual assault or abuse. They emphasise that **bystander behaviour is a critical part of the culture that supports rape and abuse.**

Examples of bystander behaviour include:

- People in a busy city street **ignoring a person** lying on the ground calling for help.
- Friends, neighbours and family **failing to act** when someone is committing domestic violence.
- Students at a drunken party who **laugh and drink** while one of them is being sexually assaulted.
- Groups of employees who **laugh along** at 'jokes' which are racist, misogynistic, homophobic, ableist, transphobic, etc., even though some or all of them feel uncomfortable about it.
- Students in a yoga class **continuing their practice as normal** while their charismatic teacher makes physical 'adjustments' to female students which involve grabbing or stroking their genitals and breasts.
- Members of an abusive group witnessing any of the red or orange flags in our previous document and **not doing or saying anything to challenge the behaviour.**

BYSTANDERS

Passive witnesses who don't support or defend abuse, but nor do they do or say anything to try and prevent it.

WHY do people behave in this way?

There are many individual and social factors affecting whether or not people act as bystanders, including:

- **Fear of the consequences of intervening**, which are unknown and can occasionally be severe.
- **Lack of education**. Bystanders may not know how to intervene skilfully.
- **Discomfort or shame** in cases of sexual harassment or abuse.
- **Diffusion of responsibility**. If there are many bystanders, then the responsibility to act doesn't fall on any one individual. Each person may then hold back, assuming someone else will step forward. This leads to...
- **The 'false consensus effect'**. When other bystanders don't act, their silence can be interpreted as acceptance of what's happening, even when that's not the case. Individuals are less likely to act if everyone around them is giving the (false) impression that intervening is not necessary.
- **The freeze response**. When witnessing abuse, bystanders may individually or collectively go into a 'freeze' response. This is a natural self-protective mechanism of the nervous system, which temporarily shuts down the capacity for effective action.
- **Unequal power dynamics**. When individual bystanders each have less social power than the abuser, it can be difficult or even dangerous for any of them to stand up to the abuser. This is particularly common in abusive group dynamics.
- **Ambiguity**. People are less likely to intervene if it's not clear whether harm is occurring or not. Cult leaders take advantage of this by reframing their abuse as some kind of spiritual 'lesson' which needs to be learned. Anyone attempting to stop the abuse can then be accused of blocking the target's spiritual growth.
- **Self-interest**. If people are receiving some direct personal benefit from keeping quiet, they may well do so.

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Passive witnesses who don't support or defend abuse, but nor do they do or say anything to try and prevent it.

HOW might people be supported to behave differently?

Bystander intervention trainings help people to act rather than bystand if they witness harassment, bullying or assault in public places. They often refer to the **“Five D’s of intervention”**:

- **Direct.** Directly intervening in a situation by challenging the perpetrator’s behaviour. This can be effective but is also the highest-risk option.
- **Delegate.** Where others are present, ask them for help and support, for example by summoning a professional or someone with more authority
- **Distract.** Changing the focus away from the abuse, for example by asking the perpetrator for directions or pretending to be a friend of the target.
- **Document.** For example, filming the encounter on a phone for use as evidence later. (It’s important that this isn’t simply put online without the target’s consent.)
- **Delay.** If a situation feels too dangerous to intervene at the moment, it can still be useful to respond later, e.g. by offering support to the target or confirming their description of what happened.

There is increasing evidence that in street bystander situations, **if one person speaks up or intervenes, then others will usually follow.** This is more difficult for bystanders in abusive organisations, because of the inherent group power dynamics involved.

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Karen Rain has written extensively about the abuse meted out to her and other students of Pattabhi Jois, the founder of Astanga Yoga. She makes the point that: *“Abuse persists not only because individuals do bad things, but also because people stand by and do nothing to change a toxic situation. People who never intended to harm anyone can be party to serious harm.”*

She makes the further comment that *“an organization or community can have the best policies for addressing abuse and sexual violence but that won't matter one bit if there aren't individuals who are willing to speak up when an influential or respected person does something unacceptable or ignorant. And by speaking up, are willing to risk damaging or losing any of the following: connections, status, opportunities, social capital, work, money, and sometimes more.”*

Speaking up directly to powerful, abusive leaders (the first 'D') is not always a safe or effective approach.

Another possibility is **whistle-blowing, which is a combination of the 'Delay' and 'Delegate' tactics listed above, i.e. collecting evidence of the abuse, and then later presenting it to a journalist or relevant authority.** However, whistle-blowing can also be high-risk. Whistle-blowers within some organisations have said that although their actions sometimes achieved justice, they also brought them stress, sleepless nights, threats and attacks on social media, and losing their friends and their job. Bystander intervention trainings are increasingly being used by universities, along with formal mechanisms for reporting harassment and abuse, in which the person harmed can remain anonymous if they prefer.

Author and researcher Catherine Sanderson says: *“Recent research in neuroscience has shown that our tendency to conform to the norms of our social group is hardwired into our brains... The push to stay silent in the face of bad behaviour is particularly strong when people convince themselves that their silence is in service of the greater good provided by an institution they value.”*

SUMMARY

It is clear that enabling, apologism and bystanding describe a range of behaviours and are found in a variety of situations. There is currently more understanding of these dynamics within domestic violence than there is within unhealthy group dynamics. Our intention is for this document to offer steps towards greater awareness and to generate some discussion points and possible next steps for anyone involved in these dynamics.

Enablers, apologists and bystanders in abusive groups are often traumatised by their experience. The grey zone of having been abused as well as being complicit in the abuse of others can be especially difficult to come to terms with, particularly when it's been an ongoing experience. **Our hope is that a deeper understanding of these dynamics will lead to more compassion and support for those who have been caught up in them.**

Reading this brochure, you may realise that you have experienced abuse, whether that was physical, emotional, spiritual, or otherwise. Or maybe you know someone who is under the influence of a facilitator or school that is abusive – or you suspect it might be. If there are no red flags, there may be orange or yellow flags you have identified and have questions about or would like to understand better.

If you or someone you know has been an enabler, apologist or bystander - or has been harmed by abuse which involved these dynamics - then support is available. Below are two sections of resources:

- Support for those who have been harmed
- Further information for those who would like to know more about these dynamics

FURTHER RESOURCES

Resources for those who have been harmed:

- [Victim Support Europe](#)
- [NHS and other UK-based support for targets of sexual violence](#)
- [RAINN: USA-based support for targets of sexual violence](#)
- [Cult Information Centre](#)
- [What you can do after you experienced harm in your community - Zine](#)

Resources for those who would like to know more:

- [Red Flags in Workshops project](#)
- [Enablers and Bystanders: Are They Key to Addressing the Sex Abuse Crisis?](#)
- [Janja Lalich - International authority on cults and coercion](#)
- [Steve Hassan - Cult Expert](#)
- [Enabling the Narcissist: How and Why It Happens](#)
- [What is Bystander Behavior? - The Bystander Project](#)
- [Respectable Bystanders in Yoga and Beyond](#)
- [The Bystander Effect is Complicated - Here's why](#)
- [The 5Ds of Bystander Intervention](#)
- [The Bystander Effect - book](#)
- [Disrupting the Bystander - book](#)
- [Whistleblowers on why they spoke up](#)
- [Karen Rain - Ashtanga yoga and #MeToo](#)

ABOUT THIS PROJECT:

CONSENT, POWER, AND ABUSE

This brochure is part of a series of workshops, brochures, and online content created to support facilitators, their assistants and participants to get better insights into potentially harmful dynamics at play in workshop spaces.

This brochure is free of charge and may be circulated in its entirety. No parts can be taken out and distributed separately without the author's prior consent.

You are welcome to use and adapt this material to create your own presentations and workshops, however, we request that you credit our work and inform us if you are planning to do this.

This is a work in progress. All feedback is welcomed.

If you want to support this work, you are welcome to send us a donation through Paypal: consent@exploringdeeper.com or click the donations button. All support is deeply appreciated.



ABOUT US:

Wilrieke Sophia grew up in a mix of toxic relationships between adults and being bullied. The researcher that they are, they collected the data and combined that with data from their own adult relationships, as well as some unhealthy power dynamics they observed in the world of tantra and intimacy around them as well as in people they once worked with.

Wilrieke has spent years developing structures for consent and ethics for intimacy-based workshops, creating their own workshops on personal growth through intimacy (Exploring Deeper, Cuddle Workshops International, neo-tantra, kink, ritual, eros), as well as writing on her blog for nearly a decade. They are currently writing a book on Queer Tantra

www.exploringdeeper.com

Rupert James Alison was recruited by an abusive Buddhist yoga group in his twenties. Since then he has worked with a wide variety of teachers of different embodiment practices: one or two were mostly ethical; some had integrity in some areas but not in others, and some were talented teachers but highly abusive. Very few had any kind of stated ethical position to which they could be held accountable or transparent about the power dynamics of hierarchical learning environments. Going forward, we need to do much better. Rupert is an accredited facilitator of Betty Martin's Wheel of Consent, which promotes an understanding of consent that is embodied, trauma aware, focussed on pleasure and empowerment, and takes account of individual, social and cultural power dynamics

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