

# The journey and the destination: Communicating effectively about prevention

National Sexual Assault Conference  
Philadelphia, PA  
August 22, 2019

berkeley **media** studiesgroup

Pamela Mejia, MS MPH

## Berkeley Media Studies Group

- Research on news coverage of public health issues
- Media training and strategic consultation for community groups and public health advocates
- Professional education for journalists

A project of the Public Health Institute



## Objectives

- **Describe** the “layers of strategy” and how they shape strategic communication practice
- **Identify** components of effectively communicating about sexual violence prevention
- **Develop** some of the components of an effective message to support an overall sexual violence prevention strategy



## Today's trainers

- Pamela Mejia, MS, MPH



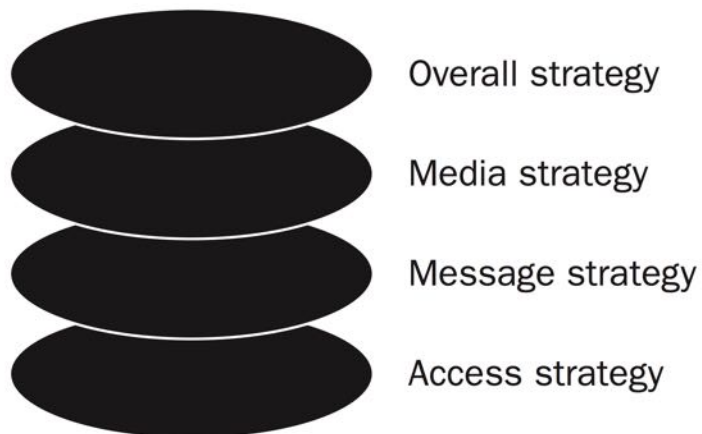


A snippet of text from a document, tilted at an angle. The visible text includes the words "correct", "the action of", "prevention.", "no", "something f", "stopping s", and "a not h".

How do we get better at communicating about sexual violence prevention?



## Message is never first: The layers of strategy



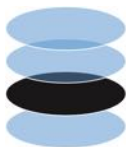
## Overall strategy



- Define the **problem** you want to address
- Clarify the **policy solution** for which you'll advocate
- Identify the **target** with the power to make the change
- Enlist the **allies** who can help make your case
- Identify what **actions** you'll take to influence the target

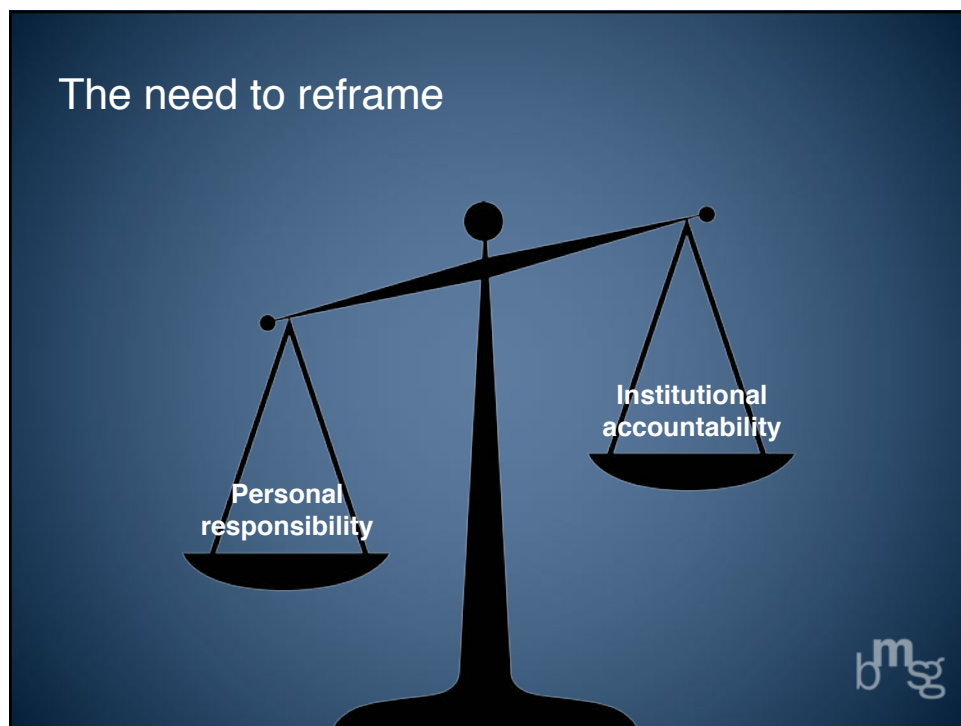
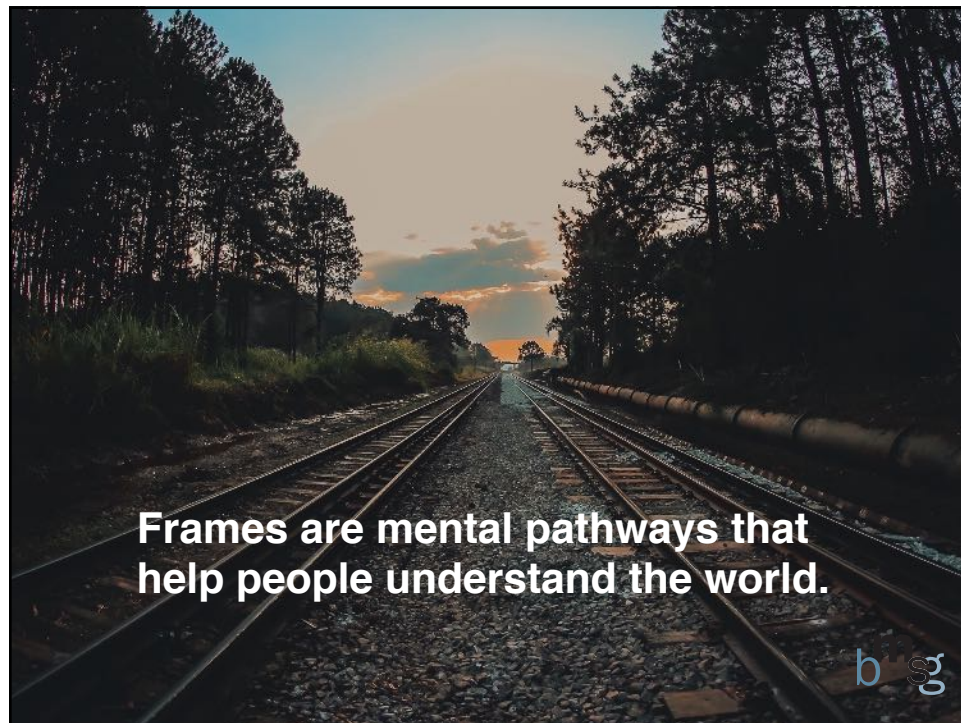


## Message strategy



- Framing:** how we frame the issue
- Message:** what we say
- Messenger:** who says it
- Target:** who we want to hear it



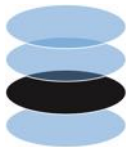


## Frames about sexual violence

- Protection of the vulnerable, safety as a right.
- Isolated, terrible — but inevitable — incidents.
- People who commit sexual violence are “bad apples” who can’t be changed.
- Sexual violence is too big a problem to solve.
- Disconnection from prevention.
- The role and responsibility of institutions in preventing sexual violence is murky.



## Message strategy



### Basic components of a message:

- Statement of problem  
*What's wrong?*
- Value dimension  
*Why does it matter?*
- Policy solution  
*Who should do what by when?*

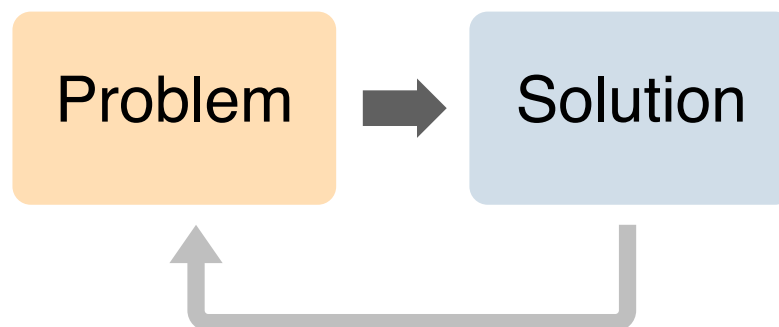


## Activity : Identifying problems and solutions

- On your index card, write a solution your organization is working toward.
- On another index card, write the problem that you are trying to solve.
- Hold onto your cards!



## Identify and clarify your solution





## Example

### Problem

I began to look in to what other colleges are doing, and thinking about how my campus could be proactive, instead of **just reacting to sexual harassment and assault**.

### Solution

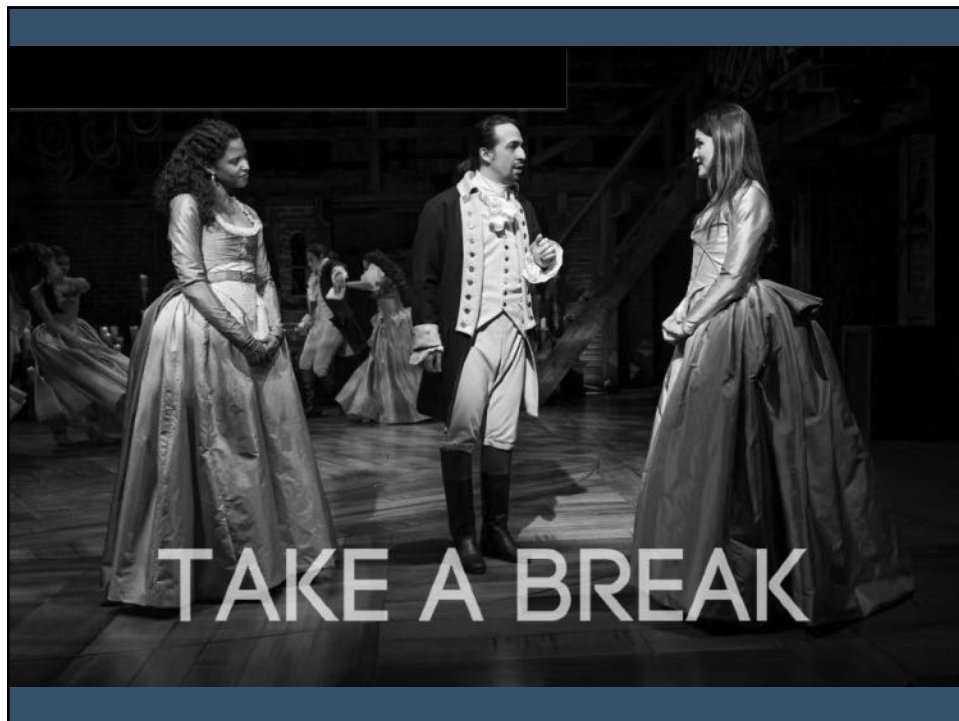
So let's clearly delineate each faculty and staff member's **roles and responsibilities in preventing sexual violence** on campus



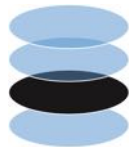
## Activity, continued

- Share your problem, and your solution, with another person. Do you feel like your problem and solution are aligned? Are there any changes you want to make?
- Pick another person to share your problem, and your solution, with.





## Recap: Message strategy



### Basic components of a message:

- Statement of problem  
*What's wrong?*
- Value dimension  
*Why does it matter?*
- Policy solution  
*Who should do what by when?*

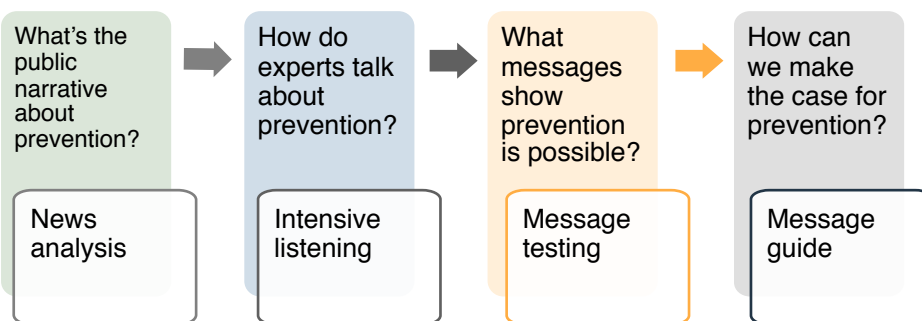


## Activity: Shared values

- What are some of the shared values that ground your work?



## Our process . . .



## An effective message about sexual violence ...

- Evokes shared **values**
- Concisely describes the **problem**
- Names a concrete **solution**
- Acknowledges negative feelings
- Illustrates success

Models a journey toward understanding and action



## Acknowledge negative feelings

People have complex, divided, and difficult feelings about sexual violence and what to do about it.

It's not necessary to fully resolve the conflict, disgust, or lingering doubt that people feel.



## Acknowledge negative feelings

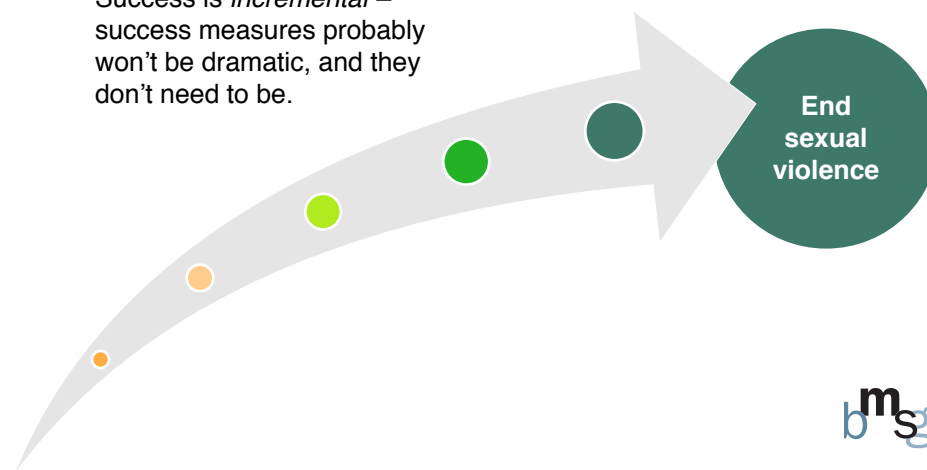
“

I know this can be a **difficult** topic to talk about – even though I talk about sexual violence a lot, sometimes when I think about it happening on our campus I feel **horrified** and **overwhelmed**. But then I think about how I’d live with myself if we as a campus didn’t do everything possible to make none of our students have to go through what my roommate did . . .”

m  
b s g

## Illustrate success

Success is *incremental* – success measures probably won’t be dramatic, and they don’t need to be.

m  
b s g

## Illustrate success

“

So we talked about what healthy masculinity is and how their words can cause harm. I quickly found that even **those simple conversations can have a big impact**. Over time each member of my team has become a champion of prevention in his own way. For instance, at a recent away game, one of the guys made a demeaning joke about a fan, and **other players on the team quickly stepped in to check him. He immediately acknowledged his behavior and talked about what he'd do differently in the future.**”

m  
b s

## Activity: Illustrating success

- Write 3 things you are proud of or that you've seen working well in your organization.
- Share one of your successes with your table.
- Place your successes on your table's paper.

m  
b s

## Model journeys toward understanding and action



- Stories about journeys help people channel their fears into action.
- The “traveler” should be someone the audience can identify with.
- The end point of the journey is the solution



## Model journeys toward understanding and action

### **What is the starting point?**

*It may be feelings of fatalism, hopelessness, or avoiding the issue altogether.*

### **What is the turning point?**

*Be explicit about the motivation for change.*

### **What are steps on the journey?**

*You may need to describe a number of steps for audiences that are very doubtful or resistant.*



## Journey example

### Starting point

I wasn't sure what to do, so I decided a first step would be just to get some education about what is possible for an organization like mine to get better at prevention.

I signed up for a conference where I heard a story from the keynote speaker...

### Turning point

That was pretty eye opening for me – the idea that an organization could actually prevent abuse from happening, just by the steps it took and the things its staff did...



## Putting it all together

I'm here because as a parent, protecting kids and helping them thrive is my priority. I was surprised to learn that sexual abuse and harassment is often committed by other children, acting out things they've seen. But then I was relieved to learn that all the research shows that if caring adults can intervene early when kids start acting out in sexual ways, and get them the help they need, abuse can be prevented.

That's why today I'm here supporting a proposal to ensure that every counselor and teacher in our state has the training they need to recognize early warning signs of harmful behavior and know what to do next. That will make every child in their care – and every child in our state – safer.

Evoking shared

Journey:  
Turning point

Journey:  
Shifting perceptions of who commits

Showing

Naming a concrete solution





## Wrapping up . . .

- Default frames focus on the individual and undermine prevention.
- You cannot have a message strategy without an overall strategy.
- Effective communication takes time and practice.
- We are here to help!



## Closing thoughts and questions

- What information do you need to develop your message?
- What do you want to practice more?
- What's your "homework"?



berkeley **media** studiesgroup

**THANK YOU!**

Pamela Mejia, MS MPH

[mejia@bmsg.org](mailto:mejia@bmsg.org)

[www.bmsg.org](http://www.bmsg.org)

Twitter: @BMSG

Facebook: Berkeley Media Studies Group

## Rules of the road

- You can't be strategic and comprehensive at the same time
- Speak plainly
- Focus on conduct, not character

**m**  
b s g

## Focus on conduct, not character

Ways to focus on *conduct*:

- Use “person-first language”
- Situate people who harm in communities and families
- Illustrate that early intervention is possible

