



Likelihood of Bystander Intervention as a Function of Perceived Social Norms

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Definitions

- ▶ Rape is defined as “any completed or attempted vagina, oral, or anal penetration through the use of physical force or threats to physically harm the victim” (National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, 2010).
- ▶ Bystander intervention is the decision of a third party to take action in a perceived, ongoing, or completed sexual assault in order to assist the victim. The primary goal of bystander intervention is to prevent sexual victimization before it is perpetrated.

Research and Current Study

- ▶ Potter, Moynihan, Stapleton, and Baynard (2009), assessed the effectiveness of a poster campaign meant to increase students' willingness to intervene. Results revealed students who had reported viewing the posters were more likely to contemplate intervening and more likely to be willing to intervene.
- ▶ Research by Bohner, Siebler, and Schmelcher (2006) found that participants' agreement with rape supportive beliefs was impacted by their perception of the degree to which peers held these beliefs.
- ▶ Therefore, the aim of this study is to evaluate the degree to which an individual's perceptions of the likelihood that similar others would intervene in a potential assault situation influences their own willingness to intervene in such situations.

Hypothesis

- ▶ We tested the following hypothesis: *Self-reported intent to intervene and self-efficacy for intervening to prevent a sexual assault is influenced by one's perception of the likelihood that peers would intervene.*
- ▶ We manipulated information about the likelihood that peers would be inclined to assist a potential victim to assess the impact on participants' self-reported bystander intent and efficacy.

Methods

▶ Participants:

- ▶ Eighty-one college-aged students ($M=20.63$, range 18-39) at the University of Wyoming
- ▶ Participants were randomly assigned to one of three groups: control group ($N=25$), low perceived community support ($N=27$), or high perceived community support ($N=27$).

▶ Measures:

- ▶ *Bystander Efficacy Scale* (Banyard, Plante, & Moynihan, 2005): This scale contains 14 items which measure the percent confident the participant would be to intervene in a given sexual assault situation.
- ▶ *Readiness to Help Scale* (Banyard, Moynihan, Cares, & Warner, 2014): This scale contains 33 items related to helping potential sexual assault victims, using a 5-point ranging from “not at all true” to “very much true” to score the item. The scale contains three subscales: action, responsibility, and no awareness.

Conditions

▶ **High Community Support Condition:**

- ▶ “Results from recent studies have shown that Laramie is amongst the best college towns for bystander intervention. Students stated that they feel safe on campus and do not fear sexual assault because they believe good Samaritans would be willing to help.”
- ▶ Measures:
 - ▶ The average Laramie student's score was...
 - ▶ Bystander Efficacy Scale: 90
 - ▶ Readiness to Help Scale: 4

▶ **Low Community Support Condition:**

- ▶ “Results from recent studies have shown that Laramie is amongst the worst college towns for bystander intervention. Students were not sure if others on campus would intervene in the case of a sexual assault.”
- ▶ Measures:
 - ▶ The average Laramie student's score was...
 - ▶ Bystander Efficacy Scale: 20
 - ▶ Readiness to Help Scale : 2

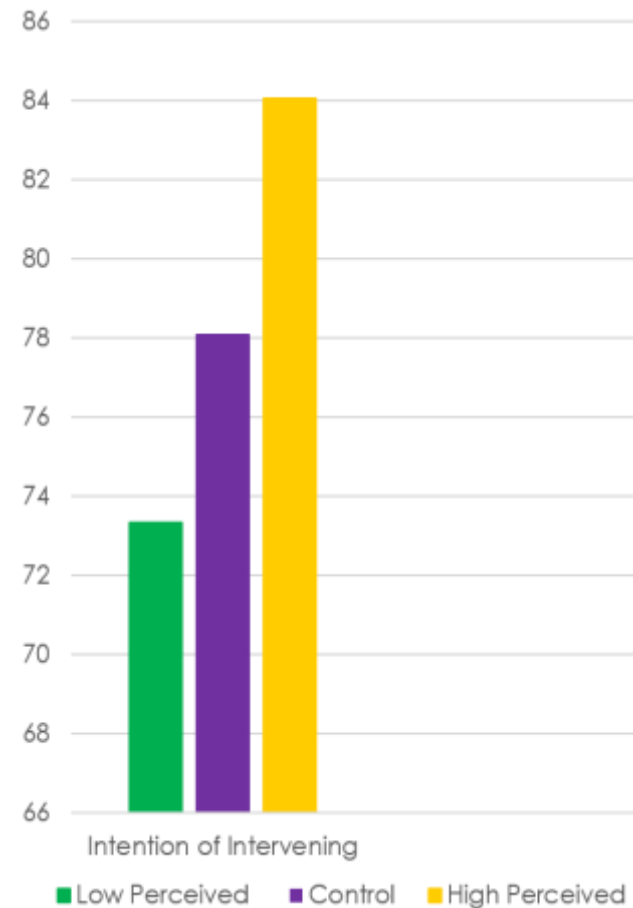
Procedure

- ▶ This study was conducted online using Sona-Systems, with all participants directed into one of three survey administration conditions. All participants were directed to fill out the Bystander Efficacy Scale and the Readiness to Help Scale.
- ▶ The control group was asked to fill out the Bystander Efficacy Scale and the Readiness to Help Scale with no feedback on level of perceived community support.
- ▶ The first experimental group received low levels of alleged community support for bystander intervention prior to filling out the above mentioned scales.
- ▶ The second experimental group received high levels of alleged community support for bystander intervention prior to filling out the above mentioned scales.
- ▶ This investigation was a very brief survey study with the intent to evaluate the degree to which responses are influenced by perceptions of the degree of community support for bystander behavior. Participants were asked to answer all questions honestly and were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses.

Results

▶ Bystander Efficacy:

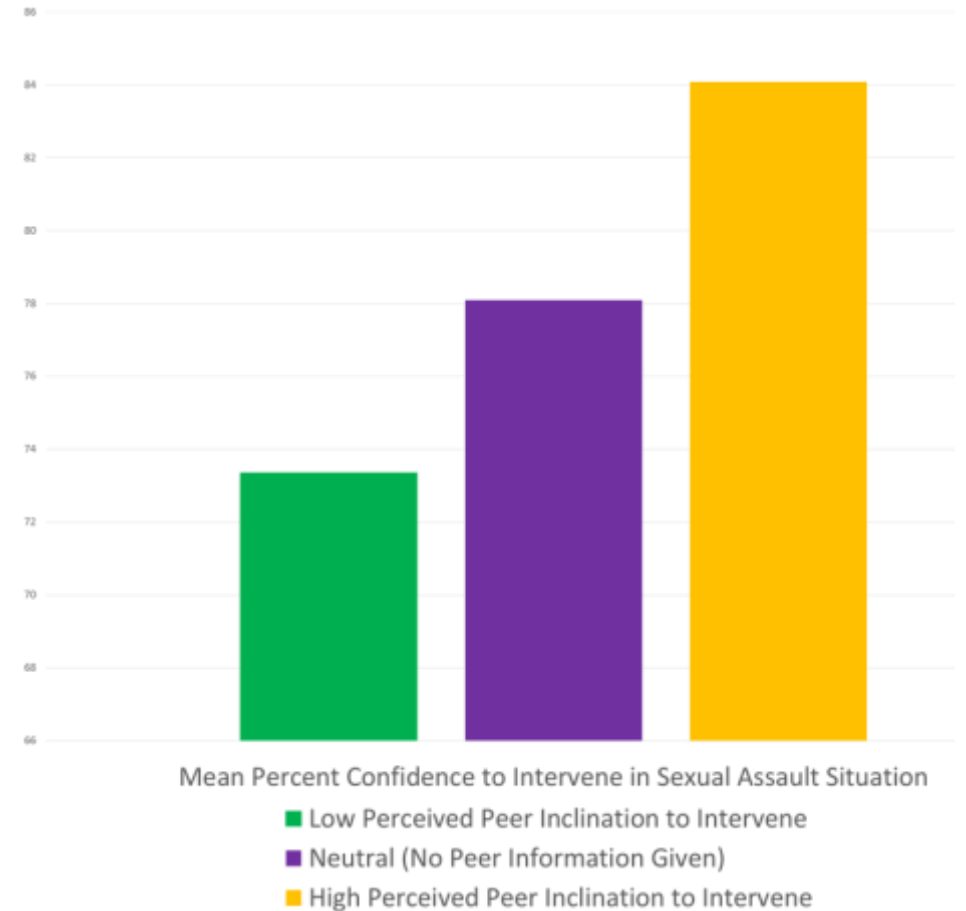
- ▶ The means of bystander efficacy in the low condition, control condition, and high condition were 73.35, 78.09, and 84.07, respectively.
- ▶ ANOVA results revealed significant results for bystander efficacy. Post-hoc t-tests revealed that there was a significant difference between the low and high conditions, but not between the experimental groups and the control.



Results

► Readiness to Help:

- Although all findings were in the predicted direction, no significant differences between the experimental conditions on any of the Readiness to Help subscales (all p 's > .1).



Results

► Readiness to Help Subscales:

	Low Condition Mean	Control Condition Mean	High Condition Mean	T value, p value
Action Subscale	1.32	1.41	1.37	$t(2) = 0.14, p = .87$ ($p = .61, p = .8,$ $p = .79$)
Responsibility Subscale	2.95	3.28	3.42	$t(2) = 1.91, p = .16$ ($p = .19, p = .06,$ $p = .55$)
No Awareness Subscale	2.23	1.79	1.93	$t(2) = 2.14, p = .13$ ($p = .05, p = .17,$ $p = .50$)

Discussion

- ▶ The results of this study show a significant influence of perceived community norms on bystander intent to intervene in order to prevent a sexual assault.
- ▶ Most importantly, with respect to bystander efficacy, when participants were led to believe that peers are disinclined to intervene in a potential assault situation, there was a much lower level of reported efficacy and intent to intervene as compared to the very high reported likelihood of intervening among participants led to believe that such behavior was likely among their peers.

Limitations

- ▶ This study is not without limitations. Notably, the sample size was small and, as a result, analyses were under-powered. We are currently in the process of collecting additional data in order to attain adequate statistical power for these analyses.
- ▶ Another limitation to this investigation pertains to its analogue nature. Although the findings are consistent with theoretically informed hypotheses, it is not clear whether manipulated information about peer support for sexual assault intervention mirrors real world perceptions of peer support.

Implications

- ▶ This finding has important implications, in that it suggests that it is not sufficient to merely educate college students about the importance of intervening to prevent sexual assault or how they might go about doing so. It is also important to make students aware of the fact that their fellow students are strongly inclined to do what they can to prevent sexual assault.
- ▶ Cultivating support for bystander interventions and personal responsibility for intervening to prevent assault is necessary for reducing sexual violence on college campuses. It is clear from these findings that perceived social norms related to helping can be highly influential in effecting such change.
- ▶ The insights this study provides may eventually inform and shape communities into more bystander-friendly environments.
- ▶ If these findings are replicable, campus entities charged with the task of reducing sexual violence should publicize campus norms that reflect support for potential victims and the importance of intervening in potential assault situations.

References

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Questions?