



Bystander Action Consequences: Attitude Responses of Victim and Perpetrator

Elizabeth A. Moschella, B.A., Victoria L. Banyard, Ph. D., & Sidney Bennett, M.A.

University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH

Affiliation with the Violence Response and Resilience Lab

Abstract

Intro. One in five women report experiencing an attempted or completed sexual assault on college campuses. However, little research has explored what happens after a bystander intervenes, specifically the responses of the victim and perpetrator. The current study investigated actual consequences of bystander actions in response to risk for sexual assault. **Methods.** Participants were recruited through introductory psychology courses and were given a series of surveys inquiring about their own bystander behavior, bystander efficacy, and barriers to intervention. **Results.** A range of attitude responses and intervention methods were identified. The most frequent responses reported by participants were victim positive and perpetrator negative. Direct intervention was associated with higher rates of victim positive and perpetrator positive responses, while distract intervention and distance intervention were associated with at least one negative response. Delegate intervention and diffuse intervention were not associated with any victim or perpetrator responses. **Discussion.** Future research should incorporate additional consequences of bystander intervention to determine all possible outcomes. Implications for policy are discussed.

Introduction

- Sexual violence is a widely reported problem in college communities (1).
- Bystanders are witnesses to high risk situations and are not involved as either the victim or perpetrator, and are present in about one third of sexual assault situations (2, 3).
- Little research has explored what happens after a bystander chooses to intervene.
- Perceived consequences influence a bystander's willingness to intervene, and include factors such as pros and cons, fear of embarrassment, threat to a relationship, and physical and fiscal consequences (3, 4, 5, 6, 7).
- Actual consequences have seldom been studied, and research that has explored this topic is not in regards to sexual violence (8).
- The current study described the responses bystanders received to their actions and explored the relationship between these responses and types of helping engaged in.
- This study investigated the relationship between these responses, Burn's audience inhibition barrier, and reported bystander efficacy.

Methods

Participants:

- 150 students responded from a campus of a northeastern university.
- Students qualitatively described the attitude responses of the victim and perpetrator.
- Mean age of sample – 18.99 years.
- 93 females and 57 males.
- 84.0% – freshman and sophomores, 16.0% – juniors and seniors.

Measures:

- Actual bystander action responses
- Bystander Efficacy Scale (Banyard, Planté, and Moynihan, 2002)
- Barriers Scale (Burn, 2009)

Procedures:

- Participants were recruited through introductory psychology courses.
- Participants completed an online survey inquiring about their bystander perceptions, bystander efficacy, and barriers to intervention.
- Participants also qualitatively responded to questions inquiring about actual bystander behavior in response to risk for sexual assault.

Data Analysis Plan:

- Chi-square analyses were performed in the current study to determine if there is a relationship between types of helping and types of attitude responses.
- Pearson correlations were conducted to determine if a relationship exists between bystander efficacy, audience inhibition barrier, and responses of the parties involved.

Results

A series of victim and perpetrator responses were described, as shown in Table 1. The types of consequences identified are as follows:

- Victim Positive (30.0%) = happy, thankful, or relieved response from the victim
- Victim Negative (10.0%) = angry, upset, or annoyed response from the victim
- Perpetrator Positive (6.0%) = happy, thankful, or relieved response from the perpetrator
- Perpetrator Negative (30.7%) = angry, upset, or annoyed response from the perpetrator

Table 1. Frequency of responses of the parties involved and examples (N = 150)

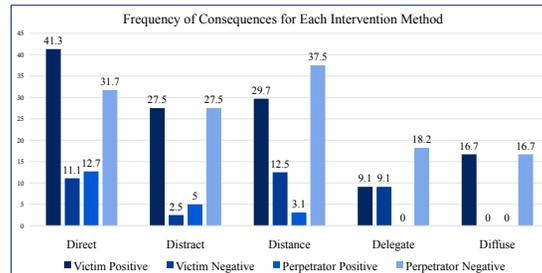
| Response Type | Frequency (%) | Example quote |
|----------------------|---------------|---|
| Victim positive | 30.0 | 'she was happy' 'she appreciated me intervening' 'girl seemed relieved' 'my friend was grateful' |
| Victim negative | 10.0 | 'she was reluctant' 'they were mad at first' 'she was upset at me' |
| Perpetrator positive | 6.0 | 'guy was very friendly' 'everyone agreed with me' 'the boy didn't know about the conversation, seemed happy and nice to me' |
| Perpetrator negative | 30.7 | 'he was mad' 'THE GUY WAS UPSET' 'the male did not react very well.' 'guy was pissy' |

The types of helping identified are as follows:

- Direct (42.0%) = talking to the parties involved about the behavior they are engaging in
- Distract (26.7%) = introducing a new conversation topic to the parties involved
- Distance (42.7%) = distancing one party involved from the other party involved
- Delegate (7.3%) = telling the friends of the parties involved about the behavior the parties involved are engaging in, or calling an RA or 911
- Diffuse (4.0%) = calming down the parties involved

Intervention Methods and Consequences

In the figure below, for each type of intervention method used the frequency for victim and perpetrator responses are listed.



Direct intervention:

- The most common responses reported were victim positive and perpetrator negative.
- A significant relationship was found for direct intervention and victim positive response, $\chi^2(1, N = 150) = 6.57, p < .05$, where direct intervention was associated with higher rates of victim positive responses.

Direct intervention *Continued:*

- A significant relationship was found between direct intervention and perpetrator positive response, $\chi^2(1, N = 150) = 8.64, p < .01$, where direct intervention was associated with higher rates of perpetrator positive responses.

Distract intervention:

- The most common responses reported were victim positive and perpetrator negative.
- A significant relationship was found between distract intervention and at least one negative response, $\chi^2(1, N = 150) = 4.71, p < .05$, where distract intervention was associated with higher rates of at least one negative response.

Distance intervention:

- The most common responses reported were victim positive and perpetrator negative.
- There was a significant relationship found between distance intervention and at least one negative response, $\chi^2(1, N = 150) = 4.19, p < .05$, where distance intervention was associated with higher rates of at least one negative response.

Delegate intervention:

- The most common response reported was perpetrator negative.
- No relationship was found between delegate intervention and positive or negative responses of the victim and perpetrator or any positive or negative response.

Diffuse intervention:

- The most common responses reported were victim positive and perpetrator negative.
- No relationship was found between diffuse intervention and positive or negative responses of the victim and perpetrator or any positive or negative response.

Bystander Efficacy and Audience Inhibition Barrier

- No relationship was found between bystander efficacy and negative responses of the victim or perpetrator.
- No relationship was found between the audience inhibition barrier and negative responses of the victim or perpetrator.

Conclusion & Implications for Research, Practice, and Policy

- Perpetrator negative was the most common response reported, followed by victim positive.
- Distance intervention was the most common type of helping, followed by direct intervention and distract intervention.
- Direct intervention was associated with the most positive responses, while both distract and distance intervention were associated with at least one negative response.
- Negative responses were not associated with lower scores of bystander efficacy and increased audience inhibition barrier.
- Future research should incorporate more specific questions about a variety of consequences (beyond attitude responses) resulting from bystander intervention in response to risk for sexual assault.

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Contact Info: Eam2004@wildcats.unh.edu