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What Would You Be Feeling?
An Exploration into the Relationship between Emotions and Bystander Intervention to Reduce Sexual Assault

An Undergraduate Honors Thesis
Submitted in Partial fulfillment of
University Honors Program Requirements
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

by

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March 12, 2023

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Abstract

Bystander intervention is thought to be an important strategy to reduce sexual assault toward women, and identifying predictors of bystander intervention may be key to developing effective protocols to increase bystander intervention in sexual risk situations. The dominant theoretical models of bystander intervention in the field primarily focus on cognitive decision-making while there has been less focus on emotional reactions as predictors of bystander intervention. Yet emotions, especially negative emotions, can motivate behavior that may relieve the negative emotions that were provoked by witnessing sexual assault. Thus, the purpose of this study was to fill these critical gaps in the literature; specifically, we sought to describe the different emotional reactions to witnessing a sexually risky situation between a male perpetrator and female victim as well as examine the connections between emotional reactions and bystander intervention. We used an existing dataset of 498 participants from Amazon's Mechanical Turk. First, the participants viewed a written vignette that depicted a low or high sexual risk situation. All participants then responded to an open-ended question about their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in this situation. A team of three undergraduates analyzed the participants' text reactions for emotions, the use of adverbs qualifying the emotions, and the targets of the emotions. Our hypotheses were that those who are in the high-risk condition would express more emotions overall than those in the low-risk condition, those who expressed emotion would be more likely to also have expressed intervention behaviors, higher certainty emotions would have stronger associations with intervention variables, and those who qualified their responses with adverbs would be more likely to also intervene. The first hypothesis was partially supported; those in the low-risk condition were more likely to express no emotion. The second hypothesis was fully supported; there was a significant association between expressing emotion and a

continuous intervention variable. The third hypothesis was partially supported because upset and indifference were the only emotions to have a significant association with intervention. The fourth hypothesis was partially supported as those who used minimizing adverbs had a lower mean score on the continuous intervention variable, and those who used emphasizing adverbs had a higher score on the continuous intervention variable, while the association between adverb usage overall and intervention was null. Significant associations were found between specific emotions and intervention strategies, and intention to intervene in exploratory analyses. Limitations, implications, and future directions will be discussed.

What Would You Be Feeling? An Exploration into the Relationship between Emotions and Bystander Intervention to Reduce Sexual Assault

In the United States, approximately 1 in 5 women have been raped in their lifetime and half have experienced another sort of sexual violence (Basile et al., 2011). A study of university students found that experiencing sexual assault predicts negative behavioral, mental, and academic effects (Kaufman et al. 2019). Approaches to confront the urgent issue of sexual violence include, but are not limited to, norms and policy change, educating families and children on healthy associations, and bystander intervention.

There has been a great effort in the past decades to investigate and understand sexual violence, especially ways to prevent and disrupt sexual assault (Yeater and O'Donohue, 1999). Bystander intervention, conceptualized by Darley and Latane (1968), is a potential way to reduce sexual violence and is characterized by an observer or witness intervening in a potential sexual risk situation. Indeed, many studies now examine when and why people may intervene to reduce sexual assault. For example, studies have found that gender predicts bystander intervention to reduce sexual assault (McMahon 2010).

In addition to introducing the notion of bystander intervention to the field, Latane and Darley introduced 5 decision-making steps that observers engage in when deciding whether to intervene or not. While early work in this area focused on decisions to intervene in emergency situations (Latane and Darley, 1968), this model was recently been adapted to specifically understand decision-making to intervene in sexual risk situations (Burn 2009). The five steps of bystander intervention are as follows, “bystanders must first notice the event, then identify it as one where intervention is needed, then take responsibility for intervention, then decide how to help, and finally, act to intervene” (Burn, 2009, p. 779). Sometimes bystander intervention takes the form of interrupting an active sexual risk situation, but a bystander can also intervene in

situations when harmful language is being used that may perpetuate violent attitudes toward others or when they witness early warning signs of potential sexual risk.

Much of the research and education around bystander intervention is concerned with the social aspects of situations in which sexual violence occurs and how they impact whether observers decide to intervention or not. For example, there is research on the influence of gender, race, and peer norms (Brown, Banyard, & Moynihan, 2014). These external factors are crucial in understanding the situations in which bystanders may be more likely to step in. There is also research on cognitive aspects of bystander intervention, for example, identifying the situation as risky and taking responsibility for helping have been identified as key predictors of bystander intervention (Burn 2009).

No doubt, social and cognitive factors are important predictors of bystander intervention, but one factor that has received considerably less attention is emotion—that is, there is less research on the internal and emotional experience of witnessing a risky situation and wrestling with whether to get involved. A close inspection of the literature reveals a handful of studies that are potentially connected to emotion. One study, for example, found that positive reactions (e.g., pride, satisfaction) following a risky situation were related to higher efficacy (confidence) and intention to intervene in the future, while negative reactions (e.g., regret, embarrassment) were associated with lower efficacy and intent (Banyard, et al. 2021, p. 284). Another study found that social anxiety was negatively related to opportunities to intervene (Uhrig 2018).

Building on the limited past research, the purpose of this project was to investigate what role a range of specific emotions play in bystander intervention. Situations with sexual risk may elicit a range of emotions, and emotions, both current and anticipated, have been found to guide behavior and judgment (DeWall, et al., 2016). This research into the association between

emotions and intervention may help contribute to the development of better training protocols that target how different emotional experiences may increase bystander intervention and reduce rates of sexual violence.

Our first research question was what emotions do people report experiencing when they encounter potential sexual violence? This question was formed to be broader and more descriptive since there is not wide research on this area. This research question was narrowed down to the first hypothesis that people will report different emotions in the low and high-risk versions of the vignette. More specifically, we hypothesized that higher certainty emotions (characterized by more control) will be reported more in the high-risk conditions and less certainty emotions (characterized by less control) will be reported more in the low-risk condition (Hypothesis 1). Our second research question was do emotions, in general, contribute to greater bystander intervention? We hypothesized that there will be a significant association between the report of emotion and intervention when people encounter a situation with sexual risk (Hypothesis 2). Under this research question, we also ran exploratory and descriptive analyses between emotions and intervention strategies. Our third research question was do specific emotions have stronger associations with bystander intervention than others? We hypothesized that anger, worry, discomfort, and upset (e.g., emotions characterized by more certainty and control) will have stronger associations with intervention than disgust, fear, sadness, joy, surprise, and indifference (e.g., emotions characterized by less certainty and control) (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985, Hypothesis 3).

While the emotional nuance was of primary interest in this study, the linguistic nuance was also under consideration. Our fourth research question was does using adverbs to qualify emotional statements predict greater bystander intervention than not using adverbs? We

hypothesized that a) those who use adverbs overall will have a stronger association with intervention than those who do not use adverbs, and b) there will be a negative association between using minimizing adverbs and the continuous intervention variable and c) there will be a positive association between using emphasizing adverbs and the continuous intervention variable (Hypothesis 4a-c).

Method

Participants

Participants were 498 workers from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk). The mean age of the sample was 24.85 (*SD* = 2.98) with participants ranging from 18 to 30 years old. In terms of self-reported gender, 35.7% (*n* = 178) identified as men, 58.6% (*n* = 292) as women, 0.6% (*n* = 3) as transgender men, 0.2% (*n* = 1) as transgender women, 2.6% (*n* = 13) as non-binary, 1.0% (*n* = 5) as gender queer or gender diverse, and 1.0% (*n* = 5) as a gender identity not listed. For self-reported sexual identity, 73% of participants identified as straight/heterosexual (*n* = 365), 1.8% as gay (*n* = 9), 4.4% as lesbian (*n* = 22), 15.1% as bisexual (*n* = 75), 4.4% as pansexual (*n* = 22), 1.6% as queer (*n* = 8), 1.4% as asexual (*n* = 7), and 1.32% as a sexual identity not listed (*n* = 6). For racial identity, 10.2% (*n* = 51) identified as Asian, 13.7% (*n* = 68) as Black of African American, 0.6% (*n* = 3) as Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, 65.5% (*n* = 326) as White, 8.0% (*n* = 40) as biracial or multiracial, and 1.6% (*n* = 8) as a race not listed (e.g., Indigenous, Middle Eastern). Most participants were not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin (*n* = 434, 87.1%). One person did not report their gender identity, two people did not report their race, and eight people did not report their ethnicity. Demographic data were not used in analyses. The primary data was gathered and analyzed by Baildon et al. (under review).

Measures

Risk Condition. Participants were randomly assigned to read either a low or high-risk vignette (see Appendix A). The portions in parenthesis represent where the narrative would differ between groups, with the first option being presented to the low-risk condition and the second option being shown to the high-risk condition.

Intervention Scales. The variable drawn from the mean of 12 intervention behaviors was used as a quantitative variable in many of the analyses. To distinguish this variable from the other variables, the mean of 12 intervention behaviors will be referred to as the *continuous intervention variable* throughout the rest of this paper. The participants could report how likely they would do intervention behaviors on a 5-point scale from 1 (Not Likely at all) to 5 (Extremely likely) (Table 1).

Table 1. 12 Intervention Behaviors

Go over to them and distract (Christina/Shannon) (e.g., tell her you want to leave, ask her to come dance with you).
Go over to them and distract (Trevor/Mark) (e.g., tell him someone is looking for him).
Create a distraction that might catch their attention
Tell (Vicki/Tina), your other friend, and ask her to get involved with you.
Find the party host and tell them about the situation.
Alert other people at the party about the situation.
Call the police.
Go over to them and ask (Christina/Shannon) if she is okay or if there is anything you can do.
Go over to them and tell (Trevor/Mark) that he needs to leave her alone.
Call someone to ask for their advice.
Text or call (Christina/Shannon) to see if she’s okay or if there is anything you can do.
Check in with (Christina/Shannon) tomorrow and ask how she is feeling about the party.

Intervention Strategies. In a previous study (Baildon et al., under review), the participants' open-ended text responses were analyzed for specific intervention strategies: distract, delegate, care/support, investigate, separate, confront, delay, and unspecified.

Intention Scale. Intention to intervene was measured by the question "Generally, how likely are you to intervene to prevent a sexual assault?" on a 6-point scale from 1 (not at all) to 6 (extremely).

Qualitative Coding Scheme. A team of three undergraduate students analyzed 498 responses which were the participants' open-ended general reactions to the situation. Participants were asked:

> What would you think, feel, and do (if anything) next if you just watched this interaction take place? What would you be thinking? What would you be feeling? What would you be doing? Please answer these questions in as much detail as possible. You will not be able to move on until 60 seconds have passed. If you finish before then, please re-read what you have written and write down anything else you can think of.

A qualitative coding manual (see Appendix B) was developed through an inductive approach as we searched random samples of responses for a broad range of emotions, types of adverbial responses, and targets.

Participant Response Example. Participants responded to the open-ended question above. Here are two examples of participant responses:

> I would feel uncomfortable. I would be feeling like I should say something and make sure she wants to go because I already heard her say she did not want to. I would be worried she was uncomfortable or being forced into a situation she didn't consent to. I would be feeling very worried. (ID 359)

> I would feel really upset about the situation. I would feel really frustrated if that was me and I would want a friend to probably intervene. I probably wouldn't let Christina leave with him and would tell Christina that I was going to take her home. I would be also be thinking that maybe Christina had too much to drink and maybe can't provide clear consent if anything were to happen. I would also be horrified that a man would take advantage of a woman like that. (ID 372)

Emotion. The coding team narrowed down the possible emotions to anger, disgust, upset, discomfort, fear, worry, sadness, surprise, joy, and indifference. Emotions overall were defined in the codebook as "a subjective experience, a physiological response, and a behavioral or expressive response." The following table displays the definitions for the specific emotions drawn from the online Merriam-Webster Dictionary. Some definitions were modified as we were refining the codebook to better fit the context of our project, some definitions were combined with alternative definitions in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, and examples from a random sample of participant responses were provided under each emotion, adverb, and target choice.

Table 2. Emotion Definitions

Anger: a strong feeling of displeasure and usually antagonism; irritated
Disgust: marked aversion aroused by something highly distasteful
Upset: emotionally disturbed or agitated
Discomfort: mental or physical uneasiness
Fear: an unpleasant often strong emotion caused by anticipation or awareness of danger
Worry: mental distress or agitation resulting from some concern usually for something impending or anticipated; anxiety; concern; uncertainty; apprehension
Sadness: affected with or expressive of grief or unhappiness

Surprise: the feeling caused by something unexpected or unusual

Joy: the emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires

Indifference: absence of compulsion to or toward one thing or another; apathy

No Emotion: the response contains no language related to emotions

Adverb. The possible types of adverbs to be coded for were identified as emphasizing and minimizing. Minimizing adverbs were considered interchangeable with the term downtoners and were defined in the codebook as an "adverb that downtones the modified/qualified emotion or judgment". Emphasizing adverbs were also referred to as amplifiers and were defined in the codebook as an "adverb that amplifies the modified/qualified emotion or judgment". Although these terms are actual linguistic terms, these definitions were created and tailored by our coding team.

Target. The possible choices for the target of the emotion were Trevor (perpetrator), Christina (victim), oneself, and the situation. Multiple targets were only coded if an emotion was mentioned more than once with different targets in a response.

Reliability Analyses

Each response was coded at least once, with 40% of the responses being coded twice for reliability purposes. After the responses were coded for emotion, adverb, and target, we employed reliability analyses through Cohen's Weighted *kappa*. The overall average *kappa* for emotions was 0.86. The overall average *kappa* for coding adverbs across the emotions was 0.84. However, *kappas* were unable to run for the emotions of surprise, joy, and upset and their respective coded adverbs due to their low frequencies. The overall average *kappa* for coding the targets across emotions was 0.75. The *kappas* were unable to run for the target of oneself, as well

as for all targets across surprise, fear, upset, and indifference due to their low frequencies.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk for a 20-minute survey entitled "The impact of information delivery on attitudes and behaviors". Participants were compensated $2.00 for completion of the study. Following informed consent, participants were randomly assigned to read one of two written vignettes: low or high-risk. Participants were instructed to pay careful attention and imagine that they are attending the party described in the vignette with their friend. Following the vignette, participants then completed the study measures, which took approximately 20 minutes to complete.

After reading the vignette, participants responded to an open-ended prompt about their reaction to the risky situation. Next, participants completed other measures of bystander intervention and the other steps to helping posited by the situational model (i.e., interpret as high risk, take responsibility, decide how). Finally, participants reported demographic information.

Results

We began with descriptive analyses to investigate the frequencies of specific emotions, adverbs, and targets. The frequencies do not add up to 100 because each variable stands alone rather than being a value of a larger variable. Therefore, the frequency percent is the portion of that variable compared to the remaining variables in that category rather than a portion of the remaining values under a single variable. For example, the frequency of anger was 13.3%, and the remaining emotions that could be coded, including no emotion, made up the other 86.7%. Emotions were reported to be present in 284 (57%) of the participant responses. Overall, 347 emotions were reported, as more than one emotion may be present in a single response. See Table 3 for the frequency of each emotion. To address the first research question of what emotions people report experiencing when they encounter potential sexual violence, it was found that worry, discomfort, and anger were the most frequently coded emotions, while joy, surprise and indifference were coded the least.

Table 3. Emotions Frequencies and Percentages

	Frequency	Percent
Emotion Present	284	57.0
Anger	64	13.3
Disgust	19	4.0
Upset	19	4.0
Discomfort	88	18.3
Fear	20	4.2
Worry	111	23.1
Sadness	10	2.1
Surprise	4	.8
Joy	3	.6
Indifference	9	1.9
No Emotion	197	41.0

Responses were coded for the degree of intervention language. 417 (83.7%) of the responses were coded as having an intervention, 16 (3.2%) as containing a conditional intervention, 26 (5.2%) as having no intervention, and 39 (7.8%) as having no mention of intervention. The most frequently described intervention strategies were found to be separation with 235 (54.3%) cases, care/support with 119 (27.5%) cases, and confrontation with 118 (27.3%) cases.

Table 4. Intervention Strategy Frequencies

Intervention Strategy	Frequency (%)
Distract	87 (20.1%)
Delegate	27 (6.2%)

Care/Support	119 (27.5%)
Investigate	116 (26.8%)
Separate	235 (54.3%)
Confront	118 (27.3%)
Delay	8 (1.8%)
Unspecified	26 (6.0%)

The most frequent emotions directed toward targets were worry toward Christina (victim), discomfort and worry toward the situation, and anger toward Trevor (perpetrator). The least frequent target of emotion was oneself. See Table 5 for the frequencies of emotions directed toward targets.

Table 5. Frequencies and Percentages for Emotions Directed toward Targets

	Trevor	Christina	Oneself	Situation	No Target
Anger	33 (6.9%)	1 (.2%)	0 (0%)	17 (3.5%)	13 (2.7%)
Disgust	10 (2.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (1.0%)	4 (.8%)
Upset	3 (.6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	8 (1.7%)	7 (1.5%)
Discomfort	7 (1.5%)	4 (.8%)	0 (0%)	52 (10.8%)	25 (5.2%)
Fear	2 (.4%)	10 (2.1%)	1 (.2%)	4 (.8%)	4 (.8%)
Worry	6 (1.2%)	59 (12.3%)	0 (0%)	36 (7.5%)	18 (3.7%)
Sadness	1 (.2%)	5 (1.0%)	0 (0%)	1 (.2%)	3 (.6%)
Surprise	1 (.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (.2%)	2 (.4%)
Joy	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (.2%)	1 (.2%)	1 (.2%)
Indifference	0 (0%)	1 (.2%)	0 (0%)	7 (1.5%)	1 (.2%)

Participants used adverbs to qualify about a quarter of the coded emotions. More emotions were qualified with emphasizing adverbs than minimizing adverbs.

Table 6. Frequencies for the Presence of Adverbs

	Frequency (%)
Adverb Present	124 (24.9%)
Minimizing	36 (7.2%)
Emphasizing	89 (17.9%)

Among those emotions qualified with adverbs, the most frequent were qualifying discomfort, worry, and anger with emphasizing adverbs. Minimizing adverbs qualified expressions of discomfort and worry the most (Table 8).

Table 8. Frequencies (%) for the Presence of Adverbs Qualifying Emotions

	Minimizing	Emphasizing	No Adverb
Anger	2 (3.1%)	18 (28.1%)	44 (68.8%)
Disgust	1 (.2%)	4 (.8%)	14 (2.9%)
Upset	2 (.4%)	7 (1.5%)	9 (1.9%)
Discomfort	15 (3.1%)	30 (6.2%)	43 (8.9%)
Fear	1 (.2%)	3 (.6%)	16 (3.3%)
Worry	16 (3.3%)	27 (5.6%)	68 (14.1%)
Sadness	2 (.4%)	3 (.6%)	5 (1.0%)
Surprise	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (.8%)
Joy	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (.6%)
Indifference	0 (0.0%)	1 (.2%)	8 (1.7%)

To test the first hypothesis that people will report different emotions in the low and high-risk versions of the vignette, T-tests were employed to investigate the mean differences between emotions being expressed by participants in the low and high-risk conditions. For those who expressed emotion overall, there was no significant difference between the low (M = .53, SD = .500) and high-risk (M = .61, SD = .488) conditions [t(496)=-1.890, p =.059]. Those in the high-risk condition (M = .18, SD = .389) were found to have expressed anger significantly more than those in the low-risk condition (M = .08 , SD = .279), [t(479) = -3.252, p = .001], while there were no significant differences between risk conditions for the other specific emotions. Participants were found to be more likely to not express any emotions [t(479) = 2.126, p =.034] in the low-risk (M = .46, SD = .499) condition than in the high-risk condition (M = .36 , SD = .481).

To test our second research hypothesis, we ran a bivariate correlation between the presence of emotions in a response and the continuous intervention variable. In support of our research hypothesis, we found that the presence of emotions was positively associated with the continuous intervention variable (r = .91, p = .043). We ran an exploratory bivariate correlation between intention to intervene and the continuous intervention variable and found they have a strong positive association (r = .378, p < .001). There was no significant correlation between emotion and intention to intervene (r = .066, p = .143). In addition to running bivariate correlations, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed to test the second hypothesis to investigate whether there were significant mean differences in intervention behaviors between those who expressed emotions and those who did not. In support of our hypothesis, those who expressed emotional language had a statistically higher score on the continuous intervention variable than those who did not express emotional language [F(1, 497) = 4.129, p = .043].

To test our third hypothesis, we ran bivariate correlations between the individual emotion variables and the continuous intervention variable. Upset (r =.103, p =.023) and indifference (r = -.129, p = .005) were the only emotions that had a significant association with the continuous intervention variable. To explore further into the third research hypothesis, Pearson's Correlations were estimated to investigate the associations between expressing different emotions and specific intervention strategies. There was a positive association between expressing anger and the investigative intervention (r = .145, p =.003) and a strong negative association between expressing anger and the confrontation intervention (r = -.238, p < .001). Those who expressed disgust were more likely to engage in an investigative intervention (r = .101, p = .038), and less likely to separate the perpetrator and victim (r = -.125, p =.010). There were no significant associations between expressing discomfort, sadness, joy, or surprise and specific intervention strategies. Those who expressed worry in their responses were less likely to employ a distraction intervention (r = -.103, p =.036) and a separation intervention (r = -.099, p =.043). Those who expressed joy were less likely to intervene in the form of providing advice (r = -.143, p = .003). There was a negative association between expressing fear and delegating to another person in the situation (r = -.128, p = .009). If someone expressed being upset, they were more likely to also have intervened with a care and support intervention (r = .100, p = .040). Lastly, if someone expressed indifference, they were also more likely to have mentioned a separation intervention (r = .119, p = .015). There were no significant correlations between specific intervention strategies and expressing the emotions discomfort, sadness, or surprise. See the correlation matrix in Table 7 for the correlations between the emotions and intervention strategies.

Table 7. Correlations between Emotions and Intervention Strategies

	Distract	Delegate	Care/Support	Investigate	Separate	Confront	Advice	Delay	Unspecified
Anger	.040	-.042	.012	.145**	-.087	-.238**	.068	-.046	.012
Disgust	-.013	-.043	-.053	.101*	-.125*	-.061	.073	.030	.004
Upset	.011	.003	.100*	.015	-.020	-.070	.031	.029	.052
Discomfort	-.027	-.006	-.023	-.048	.081	.003	.042	.021	-.011
Fear	-.029	-.128**	-.012	.085	-.095	.006	.040	-.051	.009
Worry	-.103*	.033	-.040	-.052	-.099*	.092	.053	.040	.051
Sadness	.065	.034	.039	.037	-.008	-.007	-.016	.018	.033
Surprise	-.029	.022	-.011	-.013	.035	.051	.029	.012	.021
Joy	.024	.013	.030	.030	-.045	.029	-.143**	.007	.012
Indifference	.055	-.063	-.030	-.033	.119*	.016	.038	.015	.028

We conducted exploratory analyses to understand the association between intention to intervene and expressing emotions, adverb usage, and the continuous intervention variable. As noted above, there was a strong positive association between intention to intervene and the continuous intervention variable. Additionally, those who expressed indifference were found to have expressed lower intentions to intervene in the situation (r = -.162, p < .001). The other emotions did not have significant associations with intention to intervene. There was no significant association between adverb usage overall and intention to intervene (r = .046, p = .302). However, using minimizing adverbs, such as *a bit*, was associated with lower intention to intervene (r = -.116, p = .010) and using emphasizing adverbs, such as *very*, was associated with higher intention to intervene (r =.135, p =.003).

To test the fourth hypothesis, preliminary bivariate correlations were employed. There was a strong positive association between expressing an emotion and qualifying it with an adverb ($r = .500$, $p < .001$). There was no significant correlation between the presence of adverbs qualifying the emotion and the continuous intervention variable ($r = .034$, $p = .446$). However, using minimizing adverbs, such as *a little*, was associated with a lower score of the continuous intervention variable ($r = -.111$, $p =.013$), while using emphasizing adverbs, such as *really*, was associated with a higher score of the continuous intervention variable ($r = .116$, $p = .010$).

ANOVAs were employed to test the fourth research hypothesis to investigate the mean differences of the continuous intervention variable across adverb usage. Those who qualified their emotional language with adverbs overall were not found to have a statistically different score on the continuous intervention variable than those who did not use adverbs [$F(1, 497) = .581$, $p = .446$]. Those who qualified their emotions with minimizing adverbs, on average, were found to have significantly lower mean scores on the continuous intervention variable [$F(1, 497) = 6.172$, $p = .013$]. On the other hand, those who qualified their emotions with emphasizing adverbs, on average, were found to have significantly greater mean scores on the continuous intervention variable [$F(1, 497) = 6.721$, $p = .010$]. Additionally, ANOVAs were employed to determine if there were significant differences in the continuous intervention variable between those who qualified specific emotions with minimizing, emphasizing, or no adverbs. There was a significant difference in the continuous intervention variable between the adverb categories for sadness [$F(3, 480) = 3.394$, $p = .018$] and indifference [$F(2, 480) = 4.166$, $p = .016$]. Those who used emphasizing adverbs to qualify their indifference had a higher mean score ($M = 2.83$) of the continuous intervention variable than those who did not use adverbs ($M = 2.47$, $SD = .77$); no participants qualified their indifference with minimizing adverbs.

Discussion

Bystander intervention is thought to be a key method to reduce sexual assault risk, but little research has focused on the emotions that might be associated with intervention behaviors. The purpose of this study was to understand the association between expressing emotion and intervening in situations involving sexual risk. First, we wanted to find and describe what emotions are expressed from bystanders. Additionally, we wanted to understand if using adverbs to qualify emotional statements had an association with intervention.

Before the hypothesis testing, we gathered descriptive data on our key variables. We found that participants expressed worry, discomfort and anger the most, and they expressed joy, surprise, and indifference the least. The higher frequencies of worry, discomfort, and anger suggest that more explicitly negative emotions are experienced after witnessing a situation with sexual risk. The specific intervention strategies that were reported the most were separation, care/support, and confrontation. This descriptive finding suggests that bystanders tend toward more visible and explicit intervention strategies. The most frequent targets of emotions were worry toward the victim, discomfort and worry toward the situation, and anger toward the perpetrator. These emotions expressed toward the targets reflect appropriate responses to the risky situation and may open up opportunities for intervention.

We asked four research questions to discover more about the role of emotions and adverbs in bystander intervention with underlying hypotheses to answer each question. Our first research question was about what emotions in general are expressed when a person witnesses a potential sexual risk situation. The second research question was do emotions, in general, contribute to greater bystander intervention? Our third research question was do specific emotions (e.g., emotions characterized by more certainty and control) have stronger associations with bystander intervention than others (e.g., emotions characterized by less certainty and

control)? Our fourth research question was does using adverbs predict greater bystander intervention than not using adverbs to qualify emotional statements?

The first research hypothesis about emotions being expressed more in the high-risk condition, and higher certainty emotions being expressed more in the higher risk condition was partially supported. Contrary to the research hypothesis, there was no significant difference between risk conditions for those who expressed emotion in their response overall. This finding demonstrates that bystanders who express emotion experience it consistently regardless of the risk level of a sexual risk situation. As a situation becomes riskier the bystanders do not experience more emotions than they would in a low-risk situation. On the other hand, there was a significant difference between risk conditions for those who did not express emotion in their responses, with a greater mean of responses with no emotion in the low-risk condition. This finding suggests that there is a higher mean of participants who did not express emotion in the low-risk condition, which suggests that when there is less risk present in a situation, emotions are generally more absent. Additionally, contrary to the research hypothesis, we found that there were not many significant differences between the risk conditions for expressing specific emotions. Anger, worry, discomfort, and upset were considered as higher certainty emotions, and disgust, fear, sadness, joy, surprise and indifference were considered lower certainty emotions. The hypothesis was partially supported because there was only a difference between risk conditions for those who expressed anger, and they expressed it significantly more in the high-risk condition than those in the low risk condition. This finding suggests that most of the anger expressed was from those in the high-risk condition. Anger may motivate a bystander to intervene in order to disrupt the risky situation to protect the victim and also to relieve the negative feeling of anger. Aside from anger, there were no significant differences for the mean of

emotions across risk conditions. Participants expressed the other emotions consistently regardless of risk condition.

The second hypothesis, that there will be a significant association between the report of emotion and intervention when people encounter a situation with sexual risk, was found to be fully supported. We found through a bivariate correlation that there was a significant positive association between expressing emotion in a response and having a higher score on the continuous intervention variable. Also, in support of our hypothesis, we found that those who expressed emotional language had higher scores on the continuous intervention variable than those who did not express emotional language. This suggests that, on average, those who experience and express emotions during a sexual risk situation will intervene more than those who do not express emotions.

To delve further into this second research question, we conducted exploratory analyses between the emotions and intention to intervene. There was a strong positive association between intention to intervene and the continuous intervention variable that was the average of the 12 intervention behaviors. This finding is crucial as it illustrates there is a clear link between experiencing emotion as a bystander witnessing a risky situation and their intention to intervene. Because this data was cross-sectional, the causal association is unclear. In other words, this finding does not answer whether intention or emotion comes first. For example, it is possible that anger causes people to intervene, but it is also possible that people would report anger after intervening as an emotional justification for the intervention behavior. However, it is clear that the more one experiences emotions, the more they will intend to intervene, and vice versa. Future research utilizing experimental or longitudinal (e.g., ecological momentary assessment) designs is needed to disentangle causal explanations. The significant association between emotion and

intention is valuable to consider when designing bystander intervention training protocols. The role of emotions may best be placed within the context of the first and second steps of bystander intervention: notice the event and interpret the situation as a problem. Experiencing a negative emotion may signal to the bystander that something is wrong in their environment, prompting them to notice the event and a problem. From this position, the bystander may pursue different intervention options. Thus, with this finding, we can imagine the role of emotions throughout the phases of bystander intervention.

The third hypothesis, that higher certainty emotions would have stronger associations with the continuous intervention variable than lower certainty emotions would, was partially supported. Upset and indifference were the only emotions that had a significant association with the continuous intervention variable. Participants who reported feeling upset were likely to have higher scores on the continuous intervention variable, while those who reported indifference were likely to have lower scores. Because these were the only two emotions to have significant correlations with the continuous intervention variable, there were not enough findings under this hypothesis to confidently report that higher certainty emotions overall have stronger associations with intervention than lower certainty emotions do.

We conducted exploratory analyses to investigate the associations between specific intervention behaviors and emotions to delve deeper into the third research question. First, there was a strong positive association between expressing anger and the investigative strategy. This finding may suggest that when a bystander experiences anger, they want to learn more about the situation to better understand and address their anger and the potentially risky situation. It was surprising to find that there was a strong negative association between expressing anger and the strategy of confrontation, although there was not a hypothesis for this specific association. This

is surprising because we would intuit that if a bystander experiences anger, they would tend toward confrontation. However, upon further reflection on the insignificant association between anger and the continuous intervention variable, the finding seems sounder than at first glance because anger did not have a significant association with the continuous intervention variable in the first place. Nevertheless, it is possible that different results may come forth from a replication study in the future. On the other hand, reaction formation may be a theoretical explanation for the negative association between anger and confrontation. Reaction formation is a Freudian defense mechanism characterized by converting an "unacceptable impulse into its opposite" (Baumeister et al., 1998, p. 1085). The participants may not have felt comfortable being angry, and thus avoided making their anger noticeable through intervention and confrontation. There was a significant association between expressing disgust and the investigative bystander intervention strategy, and a negative association with the separation strategy. The first finding suggests that a bystander may want to learn more about the risky situation to relieve their disgust and discern further action, while the second may suggest that disgust may not be a certain enough emotion to motivate the bystander to physically separate the victim from the perpetrator. Expressing an emotion coded as worry was found to have a negative association with both the strategies of distraction and separation, which may suggest that experiencing anxiety in a risky situation may keep a bystander from inserting themselves in the situation as a distraction or mode of separation. There was a strong negative association between expressing joy and giving advice as an intervention strategy; however, there were three instances of expressed joy, so this finding should be interpreted with caution. The positive association between being upset and intervening with care and support may represent the inner motivation to relieve the negative feeling of being upset prompted by the risky situation by intervening with care and support to the

victim. Finally, there was a positive association between indifference and separation. This correlation is interesting as one may intuit that a person expressing indifference would not be motivated to pursue any intervention strategies. Someone who is indifferent would not feel moved to do or think one thing or another about a situation. Perhaps to get out of the ambiguous emotional space, an indifferent bystander may be moved to intervene.

Part A of the fourth research hypothesis, that those responses with adverbs overall will have a stronger association with the continuous intervention variable than those responses without adverbs, was not supported. There was no significant association between using adverbs overall and the continuous intervention variable. However, this finding is misleading unless we consider the second and third parts of the fourth hypothesis. Part B of the fourth hypothesis was that there would be a negative association between using minimizing adverbs and the continuous intervention variable. The bivariate correlation confirmed this part of the hypothesis and showed that the continuous intervention variable score was lower for those who used minimizing adverbs. Additionally, the final Part C of the fourth hypothesis that there would be a positive association between the use of emphasizing adverbs and the continuous intervention variable was found to be supported. Responses that had emphasizing adverbs were also found to have higher means on the continuous intervention variable. These two supported findings make the insignificant first finding logical. The correlation coefficients are close as numbers, but in opposite directions, balancing the null overall adverb variable that is made up of both minimizing and emphasizing adverbs.

Contrary to the first part of the fourth research hypothesis, an ANOVA showed that there was no significant difference in the continuous intervention variable between those who used adverbs and those who did not. However, upon closer inspection, the two ANOVAs using the

minimizing and emphasizing adverbs variables as independent variables confirmed the second and third parts of the fourth research hypothesis. Those who qualified their emotions with minimizing adverbs were found to have significantly lower mean scores on the continuous intervention variable. This finding suggests that those who hold back linguistically and use minimizing phrases like *a little*, *kind of*, and *a bit* to qualify their emotional statements may also be shying away from intervention behaviors. Lack of confidence in language seems to be related to lack of intervention (Banyard et al. 2021). On the other hand, those who qualified their emotions with emphasizing adverbs were found to have significantly greater mean scores on the continuous intervention variable. This finding suggests that those who may be more assertive and use phrases like *really*, *very*, and *definitely* to qualify their emotional statements may have felt more confident also expressing intervention behaviors than those who may be more reserved.

Limitations and Future Directions

In the results above, we interpreted the emotions of joy, sadness, and upset among the analyses. However, we were not able to assess reliability for those emotions due to a low sample size. The results including those emotions are to be understood cautiously and in a speculative manner. The data is cross-sectional, and it was not possible to measure or conclude causal interference. The sample was mostly white, non-Hispanic participants. The vignettes were carefully connected and only depicted heterosexual sexual assault in the context of a party. In future studies, a more representative racial, ethnic, and sexual sample may be gathered so that the results are more generalizable. Additionally, future studies may incorporate different forms of sexual assault in different settings (e.g., same-sex sexual assault, sexual assault in the workplace or school).

Results from this study may inform future bystander intervention training protocols to highlight the relevance of emotional responses and the power of intervention language. The incorporation of mindfulness and emotional awareness into bystander intervention trainings may better prepare bystanders for what they may feel and experience if they witness a risky situation, and what opportunities for intervention may arise from noticing those emotions.

Conclusion

Bystander intervention as a response to a situation with sexual risk is complex. This preliminary study gives us initial insights into how a bystander's interior emotional reactions and linguistic patterns may reflect in intervention behaviors. We have learned that there is an association between emotions and intervention behaviors. Additionally, we have shown that underneath the null association of adverb usage overall with intervention reveals a positive association between emphasizing adverbs and intervention, and a negative association between minimizing adverbs and intervention. Emotions, linguistic expressions, and intention to intervene have been shown here to be related to intervening in a situation with sexual risk. This study has shown important findings related to what role emotions have in bystander intervention. The results demonstrated that a range of emotions arise in bystanders from witnessing a risky situation, and that emotions are important factors in whether a bystander steps in to interrupt a risky situation.

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Appendix A

Written Vignettes

The text bolded and in parentheses represents that information that differed across vignette risk levels, with the low risk level first and the high risk level last, divided by forward slashes.

Your close friend Christina invites you to go to a party tonight with her and some of her other friends. They're celebrating a birthday, but Christina doesn't want to go alone so you agree to tag along. Christina broke up with her long-distance boyfriend last year, but she hasn't gotten serious with anyone since then. Before heading to the party, Christina tells you she **(is in the mood to/will not)** hook up with someone tonight. You and Christina both grab drinks when you arrive, and you start walking around the party to look for people you know. A guy Christina knows through a mutual friend and **(has had sex with a few times/doesn't know well)**, Trevor, comes over to say hello. Christina introduces you and the three of you start chatting about a movie that just came out. Christina and Trevor seem to be hitting it off, so you say you need to use the restroom and walk away.

As you're headed to the bathroom, you hear Trevor tell Christina that she looks great tonight and Christina flirts back. On your way back from the bathroom, you see your friend Vicki and stop to chat with her for a bit. After about an hour, you walk over to Christina to see how things are going. Trevor asks to get Christina another drink, and she says **("Sure, thanks!" so Trevor/"No, I'm good," but Trevor still)** gets her another drink. Next, Trevor asks if Christina wants to go sit someplace where things are quieter. He takes her hand and leads her away.

You go find Vicki to continue catching up, and you can hear what's going on where Christina and Trevor are sitting. The conversation seems normal–they're laughing and chatting. Soon

Trevor puts his hand on her thigh, so Christina **(puts her hand on his thigh/moves his hand off her thigh)**. He asks her if she wants to leave and go back to his apartment. Christina mentions that she'd like to, but she has to work early in the morning. But Trevor persists, saying, "C'mon let's go. You look so hot tonight. Don't leave me hanging." Christina says, "maybe later, I want to spend some more time with my friends". Trevor agrees to stay a bit longer.

Christina comes over to you and Vicki and tells you she's taking a break to go say hello to her other friends. After she's been talking to them for about 15 minutes, Trevor approaches her and says, "I ordered an Uber, it's almost here. Come on, I've had such a hard week, I just want to have some fun tonight." He puts his arm around her waist and starts walking towards the door.

Appendix B

Coding Manual

The following are the categories to code for while reading participant entries. Only consider words enclosed in a sentence as you code for emotion, adverb, and target.

- **Emotion:** a subjective experience, a physiological response, and a behavioral or expressive response
    - **1. Anger**: a strong feeling of displeasure and usually antagonism; irritated
        - I would be *angry* and *annoyed* that Trevor is trying to take advantage of her (460)
            - Both angry and annoyed would fall under anger
        - I would be *irritated* and upset because Christina has continuously mentioned she doesn't want to go home with Trevor. (368)
        - I would feel *bothered* by Trevor's actions. (117)
    - **2. Disgust**: marked aversion aroused by something highly distasteful
        - I'd be *grossed out* and *disgusted* at him for this, particularly because she implied that she wasn't all that interested in him. (54)
    - **3. Discomfort**: mental or physical uneasiness
        - Imagining myself and my friend in that situation I would *not feel comfortable* at all. (181)
        - I would feel *off* about the situation. (364)
            - "off" is expressing a kind of uneasiness, which would be under discomfort
        - If I was present during this interaction I would feel very *uneasy* and angry. (178)
            - Uneasy as feeling off, which is discomfort.
        - I'd feel *triggered* because I've been in a similar situation where none of my friends helped me. (397)
            - "Triggered" in popular use would fall under discomfort rather than upset, surprise, or fear.
        - This story is *creepy* to me and it *creeps* me out. (184)
            - Creepy as a sort of uneasiness, which would be discomfort

    - **4. Worry**: mental distress or agitation resulting from some concern usually for something impending or anticipated; anxiety; concern; uncertainty; apprehension
        - In that situation I would be a little *worried* about my friend (121)
        - I would be feeling very *nervous* for Christina. (164)

        - I would be feeling *anxious* for her, and disgusted by him for being so pushy. (462)
        - I would feel *scared* for Christina and make sure to not leave her side. (267)
        - Concern
            - I would feel *concerned* for my friend and would make sure to talk to her before she left. (380)
    - **5. Sadness**: affected with or expressive of grief or unhappiness
        - I'd feel *heartbroken* watching her walk out of the door unknowingly when she's already expressed a NO multiple times in different kind mannered ways. (251)
        - I feel *lonely*… (189)
        - I'd feel some *pity* for her. (3)
        - *I would feel pretty bad* for Christina because she seems to be taking advantage of. (113)
    - **6. Surprise**: the feeling caused by something unexpected or unusual
        - I would be *taken aback* that Trevor is pulling Christina to the door (266)
        - E.g., "I would be *surprised* at Christina for flirting with him" (no ID)
    - **7. Joy**: the emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune or by the prospect of possessing what one desires
        - E.g., "I would be happy for my friend, since she said she wanted to hook up with someone" (no ID)
    - **8. Fear:** an unpleasant often strong emotion caused by anticipation or awareness of danger
        - I would feel *scared* for Christina and make sure to not leave her side. (267)
        - *I wouldn't feel safe* letting my friend go with him. (451)
            - not feeling safe is an awareness of danger
    - **9. Upset**: emotionally disturbed or agitated (most often will explicitly include "upset")
        - I would feel *upset* and really worried. (285)
        - I would feel really *upset* about the situation. I would feel really *frustrated* if that was me and I would want a friend to probably intervene. (372)
            - Note: both "upset" and "frustrated" would be under this category
    - **10. Indifference:** absence of compulsion to or toward one thing or another; apathy

- Other that what was written already, my thoughts would be *indifferent*. (382)
- I feel *neutral* about that situation (104)
  - Similarly, "In this moment, I would be neutral, unless I was going to be left without a ride home." (355)
- I would feel uncomfortable having witnessed it, but really *I don't know if I would care all that much* considering this is someone she has a "association" with. (484)
- I would be very *lassiez-faire* about the whole thing. (345)
- I would be having *mixed feelings* in this situation. (125)

- **0. No Emotion**: the response contains no language related to emotions
  - I would have grabbed my friend and gotten people's attention for proof for the police. I would have yelled help to save my friend. (166)
  - *I would not mind,* and then I would go home. (130)
  - I would immediately check in with Christina to make sure she's feeling comfortable with the situation. (332)
    - Although this response mentions "comfortable", it is referring to a character's comfort/emotion rather than the participant's.

- **Adverb:** a word or phrase that modifies or qualifies an adjective, verb, or other adverb or a word group, expressing a relation of place, time, circumstance, manner, cause, degree, etc. Only consider adverbs modifying the emotion. You will only code for one adverb per emotion. If both a minimizing and emphasizing adverb are qualifying the emotion, code it as emphasizing.
  - **1. Minimizing/Downtoners**: adverb that downtones the modified/qualified emotion or judgment (ex. A little, a bit, maybe)
    - In that situation I would be *a little* worried about my friend. (121)
    - I would think that Trevor seems *a bit* pushy and sounds *rather* desperate, (158)
    - I don't honestly know what I would be feeling *maybe* surprised. (112)
  - **2. Emphasizing/Amplifiers**: adverb that amplifies the modified/qualified emotion or judgment (ex. Really, very, extremely, pretty)
    - I would be feeling *very* nervous for Christina. (164)
    - This situation *definitely* would make me feel uncomfortable. (198)
    - I *totally* upset with Trevor, he can't do this to Christina He tried to misbehave with her. (18)
    - I would feel *really* worried and nervous. (466)
    - i'd feel *most* comfortable if she left with me and i took her home. (251)
    - I would feel *so* sad, and *even* angrier

        - "even" is saying that they are feeling more angry than they do sad
  - **0. No adverb**
    - I would be feeling concerned about her welfare and safety. (150)
  - **Note:** When there are multiple emotions listed, only code an adverb for the emotion that is being qualified.
    - **Ex.** I would feel extremely anxious and uncomfortable. (265)
      - Only anxious (worry) has an adverb

- **Target**: person that the emotion is directed towards. There will only be one target per emotion in the entry. However, if one emotion is present more than once in an entry, you may select more than one target.
  - **1. Trevor**: the male perpetrator in the vignette (writing his name or masculine pronouns)
    - I'd be grossed out and disgusted at *him* for this, (54)
    - I would be very upset with *Trevor* because he is being very forceful… (335)
  - **2. Christina**: the female victim in the vignette (writing her name or feminine pronouns, or my friend)
    - I would be feeling concerned about *her* welfare and safety. (150)
    - I think I would be worried about *Christina* and would be worried about *her* safety. (12)
  - **3. Oneself**: the participant is directing the emotion towards themself
    - E.g., "I'd be mad at *myself* for not doing anything" (no ID)
  - **4. Situation:** the participant is directing the emotion toward the context of the vignette. When the participant mentions both Trevor and Christina in their entry without being clearly directed toward one or the other (ex. "angry at Trevor…", "worried for Christina…"), code situation.
    - I think the *situation* would make me feel very uncomfortable. (417)
    - I would feel uncomfortable having witnessed *it*, but really I don't know if I would care all that much considering this is someone she has a "association" with. (484)
    - If I were watching this *interaction* take place, I would feel a bit uncomfortable about *what is happening* to my friend. (454)
    - If I saw *this* go down, I would be disgusted. (233)
      - "this" is referring to the situation in the vignette.
        - Similarly, "*This story* is creepy to me and creeps me out." (184)
    - If I overheard *this* taking place *it* would upset me *to see someone pressure my friend*. (434)

- **When intervention is target of emotion, code situation**
  - I would be fearful about *'causing a scene'* (146)
  - I would be at least a little anxious/scared *to confront him* (290)
- **When more than one target and the context is mentioned code situation**
  - **Note:** This would occur when the emotion surrounds both Trevor and Christina in the sentence and is not clearly directed toward one or the other. Often after "because", "that", "about" rather than the direct "at" or "for" prepositions.
  - "I would feel uncomfortable because she said she wanted to hook up with someone and was giving attention to Trevor but also said that she was apprehensive about going back to his place." (347)
    - In this example, although "she" comes right after "because" it does not mean that Christina is the target of the discomfort. The participant goes on to describe the **situation** involving the perpetrator and the victim that is making them uncomfortable.
  - I would be irritated and upset because *Christina* has continuously mentioned she doesn't want to go home with *Trevor*. (368)

- **0. No target**
  - I would feel upset and really worried (285)
  - I would feel worried, and I think that the best way to deal with it at that time would be to speak with my friend and ask her if she could stay behind and talk with me, or something like that, preventing him from taking her in his Uber. (508)

- **Note: Multiple Targets**
  - The only time you would code more than one target is when one emotion is present more than once in an entry and they have different targets.
  - **Ex. Christina and Situation**
    - I would be ***concerned*** *for Christina* and would intervene immediately… I would be feeling angry that Trevor is trying to take advantage of my friend and probably at least a little ***anxious****/scared to confront him.*
      - In this example, worry comes up twice: first with Christina as the target and then with Situation as the target. In this case, you would select both targets for the emotion in qualtrics.

            - **Ex. Trevor and Christina**
                - I'd feel worried for Christina but also worried that Trevor might try to take advantage of someone else.
            - **No Target can be coded along with another Target**
- **Note: Multiple emotions with the same target**
    - **When there are 2 or more emotions mentioned or listed in proximity with each other, they will be coded with the same target unless they have explicitly different targets**
    - Watching Trevor try to take advantage of my friend would *piss me off*, as well as *disgust me*. (488)
    - I would feel *upset* and *angry* on Christina's behalf. (169)

Extra Examples:

- **Emotion**
    - **Discomfort**
        - If I were watching this interaction take place, I would feel a bit *uncomfortable* about what is happening to my friend.
        - i'd feel most *comfortable* if she left with me and i took her home. (251)
- **Target**
    - **Situation**
        - If I was present during this *interaction* I would feel very uneasy and angry. (178)
            - I would feel very uncomfortable because I heard *my friend* tell *him she* didn't want to go to *his* place. (75)
            - I would be concerned *she* will be forced or dragged into the car since *Trevor* is being persistent, but *Christina* stated she did not want to leave with *him*. (501)
            - **However, the following example would be coded for Trevor, not Situation.** Although both characters are mentioned, the emotion is clearly directed toward Trevor (use of words like "at" before the clear target, gut feeling of Trevor as the target)
                - I would feel angry *at Trevor* for attempting to take advantage of her. (148)