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See Something, Do Something: Predicting Sexual Assault Bystander Intentions in the U.S. Military

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Abstract Sexual assault is a pervasive problem in the U.S. military, especially against women. Bystander intervention is increasingly promoted as important for reducing sexual violence, and it may be particularly helpful in contexts with high rates of sexual violence. Bystander training encourages and enables people to intervene safely and stop sexual violence. In this study, we drew from an ecological model to investigate intrapersonal, microsystem, and exosystem factors that predicted Service members' assumption of personal responsibility to intervene in an alcohol-involved sexual assault. Moreover, we examined how these predictors played a role in decisions about how to intervene: confronting the perpetrator, assisting the victim, or finding someone to help. We analyzed data from 24,610 active duty personnel collected by the Department of Defense. Several factors significantly related to Service members' bystander intentions: gender, rank, morale, attitudes about sexual assault, training, and trust in the military sexual assault system predicted the likelihood and method of bystander intervention. These findings help identify how and why people intervene (or fail to intervene) when they witness situations that could develop into sexual violence.

Keywords Sexual assault · Prevention · Bystander intervention · Military personnel

Introduction

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Sexual violence is a pervasive problem in the U.S. Armed Forces. The Department of Defense (DoD) estimates that approximately 20,000 sexual assaults occur every year (DoD, 2014). This military sexual assault (MSA) yields negative consequences for both survivors (e.g., depression, PTSD; Kang, Dalager, Mahan & Ishii, 2005; Surís & Lind, 2008) and their workgroups (e.g., impaired productivity; Harned, Ormerod, Palmieri, Collinsworth & Reed, 2002). In response, the DoD has developed a strategic plan for changing military culture around sexual violence, including bystander intervention (DoD, 2014).

Bystander intervention is increasingly promoted as important for reducing sexual violence, especially in high-risk contexts with high rates of sexual violence (Banyard, Plante & Moynihan, 2004; Berkowitz, 2002; Coker et al., 2014). Bystanders are individuals who witness crimes or emergency situations and have the opportunity to intervene. Bystander training encourages and enables people to safely interrupt sexual violence, challenge norms and comments that support sexual violence, and provide support for sexual assault survivors (Banyard et al., 2004; Coker et al., 2014). To refine training efforts, it is important that we understand how, when, and why people intervene (or fail to intervene) when they witness situations that could develop into sexual violence. This was our aim, focusing on bystander decisions among active duty members of the U.S. military.

This study makes several novel contributions. First, we draw from an ecological model (Banyard, 2011) to examine multifaceted predictors of bystander intervention in the military—the majority of research on this issue focuses on college contexts, but the military is another high-risk context that is crucial to consider. Additionally, we examine what predicts Service members' likelihood to assume personal responsibility to stop a potential sexual assault and

the way they choose to intervene. There is little research examining why bystanders may choose different strategies of intervention (e.g., addressing the perpetrator directly, finding help).

Theoretical Background

According to bystander theoretical frameworks (Banyard, 2011), there are five steps that individuals must go through in order to provide help in a problematic social situation: (a) notice the event, (b) interpret the event as a problem, (c) assume personal responsibility for doing something, (d) decide how to intervene, (e) act. These steps apply to a wide range of situations, including sexual assault (Berkowitz, 2009; Burn, 2009). Building upon this model, research identifies a variety of ways that bystanders can intervene. Bystander actions can be direct or indirect, involve the victim(s), perpetrator(s), or other bystanders, and take place before, during, or after an assault (Berkowitz, 2009; Chabot, Tracy, Manning & Poisson, 2009; McMahon, Hoffman, McMahon, Zucker & Koenick, 2013). For example, bystanders could choose to directly confront the perpetrator, directly remove the victim, or indirectly help by finding someone else to intervene, like the victim's friend or the police.

Banyard (2011) has developed an ecological model predicting bystander intervention in sexual assault situations. Integrating Latane and Darley's (1970) model of helping with ecological models (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 2005; Kelly, 2006), Banyard's (2011) framework proposes that the following levels of analysis are important for understanding bystander behavior. First, *intrapersonal factors* are characteristics of/within individuals (e.g., gender, beliefs, cognitions). Second, *microsystem factors* include relationships and aspects of immediate groups (e.g., peer interactions, peer group structures). Third, *exosystem factors* are components of the community setting that may affect how people perceive and respond to sexual violence (e.g., availability and quality of education about sexual assault, trust in institutional responses to sexual assault). Finally, *macrosystem factors* are features of the overarching organization of a society (e.g., broader societal values, norms, and practices). Collectively, these factors influence bystanders' willingness to intervene and decisions about how to intervene in sexual violence. To date, this model has been primarily examined within college contexts. An important next step is to determine whether and how it applies to other high-risk settings, such as the military.

Bystander Intervention in the Military

The military is a unique macrosystem in which to study bystander behavior. As an organization, the military

values honor, valor, respect, cohesion, and loyalty (Schmid, 2010). When sexual assault occurs within this context, there are a number of competing messages. According to military values and training, Service members *should* rely unconditionally upon fellow troop members. However, being sexually assaulted during military service means that a service member *cannot* trust her/his fellow troop members—either to respect their bodily autonomy and dignity or, when applicable, to intervene before an assault takes place; for example, when Service members are sexually assaulted by other Service members (Harned et al., 2002). Bystander training, rather than victim-focused education/prevention programs (e.g., how to avoid rape), aims to change the culture around MSA and make all community members aware of and responsible for stopping MSA. Given that context is more predictive of MSA than any individual factor (e.g., history of sexual assault, age; Firestone, Miller & Harris, 2012; Sadler, Booth, Cook & Doebbeling, 2003), this is a much needed prevention strategy for MSA.

Joint Chiefs of Staff stressed the importance of "education and training to promote a professional culture that imbues knowledge, awareness, communication, personal responsibility and the empowerment to act" (DoD, 2014, p. 1). Over the past 10 years, the DoD has made efforts to increase bystander training and behavior (Potter & Stapleton, 2012). For instance, the creation of the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO) in 2005 coincided with the implementation of Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) campaigns. SAAM campaigns attempt to raise awareness of MSA and promote bystander intervention. For example, the 2009 "Our Strength is for Defending" campaign used posters and videos to communicate that it is the duty of every Service member to "prevent sexual assault by taking an active role in looking out for the welfare of friends and co-workers" (Department of Defense, 2009).

Given these efforts, it is important to know how Service members interpret and enact their roles as bystanders. A few prior research studies have taken up this aim. Potter and Moynihan (2011) found that Army personnel were significantly more likely to engage in bystander behaviors to prevent sexual assault after participating in a bystander training program (Bring in the Bystander) tailored to the Army context. Similarly, Foubert and Masin (2012) compared the effects of a bystander training program adapted for the military (The Men's Program) with a typical Army sexual assault brief on male soldiers' willingness to intervene in a sexual assault, and found that men in the bystander training program were significantly more willing to help after training. Potter and Stapleton (2012) examined the effects of an adapted social marketing campaign (Know Your Power) for an Army installation, and

found that exposure to the images increased soldiers' sense of personal responsibility to intervene during a sexual assault, and this effect was strongest for those who identified with the content of the posters. These studies illustrate that bystander training can be effective for military personnel. The current study builds and expands upon this work.

We drew from Banyard's (2011) ecological model of bystander behavior to investigate intrapersonal, microsystem, and exosystem factors that predict Service members' assumption of personal responsibility to intervene in an alcohol-involved MSA situation (Research Question 1). Moreover, we examined how these predictors shape employees' decisions about how specifically to intervene in this situation: confronting the perpetrator, assisting the victim, or finding someone to help (Research Question 2). Although bystander intentions are not the same as bystander actions, prior research demonstrates that intentions to intervene as a bystander predict actual bystander behaviors (Banyard, 2008; Banyard & Moynihan, 2011; McMahon et al., 2015). The following sections detail the predictors of bystander intervention examined in the current study.

Intrapersonal Factors

Most research on bystander intervention occurs at the person level, examining factors within individuals (e.g., social identities, attitudes, emotions) that affect bystander behavior (McMahon, 2015). Two of these factors—gender and beliefs about sexual assault—may be particularly important for bystander intentions in a military context.

Gender

Previous studies have identified gender as an important variable for understanding MSA bystander behavior. Men are less likely than women to intervene as bystanders in instances of sexual assault (e.g., Banyard, 2008; Banyard & Moynihan, 2011; Burn, 2009). However, when they do intervene, men may be more likely to interrupt perpetrators, whereas women may be more likely to assist victims directly (Burn, 2009; Chabot et al., 2009). Compared to men, Service women endure far more MSA (Surís & Lind, 2008). Women also endorse fewer myths about rape and sexual assault (Banyard, Moynihan & Plante, 2007). We therefore expect that women will be more likely than men to perceive MSA as a salient risk, notice events related to sexual violence risk, and take steps to intervene.

Beliefs About Sexual Assault

Attitudes and beliefs are important antecedents of bystander actions. A bystander must first appraise a situation as risky or problematic before deciding whether or not to intervene. Awareness of sexual assault as a problem predicts likelihood of bystander behavior. Conversely, problematic attitudes related to sexual assault (e.g., women exaggerate rape allegations) relate to negative bystander attitudes and lower likelihood of active bystander behavior (Banyard, 2008, 2011). Over the past 10 years, the U.S. military has made more concerted efforts to increase awareness of sexual violence as a problem that affects all military members. Service members who have internalized these messages (e.g., sexual assault is a problem) may be more likely to assume personal responsibility and engage as a bystander.

Microsystem Factors

According to ecological models, several layers of context surround and guide individual action. The most immediate layer of context is the microsystem, which includes social roles, interpersonal relationships, peer influences, and aspects of the immediate physical environment (Banyard, 2011; Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The context where assault takes place is increasingly considered a crucial element to bystander behavior (McMahon, 2015). We consider how two elements of the microsystem—member rank and unit morale—relate to bystander intentions.

Rank

Social standing may be an important factor contributing to bystander intervention (McMahon, 2015). Rank is an important indicator of the military microsystem, reflecting Service members' roles, peer group, interpersonal context, and power within a rigid hierarchical structure. Previous research with college student populations finds that these microsystem factors predict bystander behavior. For instance, other individuals within one's peer group can influence whether or not a bystander chooses to take action, especially when bystander intervention challenges (or promotes) one's status in a group (Banyard et al., 2004). Lower power—or more precarious status—is negatively associated with active bystander behavior. Given greater social and organizational power, higher ranking personnel have greater ability (and sometimes obligation) to interrupt sexual assault, compared to those at lower ranks. We predict that rank will translate into greater intentions to intervene among officers compared to enlisted personnel.

Unit Morale

Morale within a unit may facilitate bystander behavior. Key components of morale include group cohesiveness,

confidence that fellow Service members and unit leaders will protect oneself, and reciprocity to protect and serve in kind (Manning, 1994). We know from prior research on college groups (e.g., sports teams) that a close bond among members is one of the strongest predictors of willingness to intervene in sexual assault situations (Banyard, 2008; McMahon, 2015; McMahon & Farmer, 2009). Group cohesiveness has also been linked to more direct and active bystander behavior (Rutkowski, Gruder & Romer, 1983). We therefore expect higher morale to predict greater and more direct bystander intentions.

Exosystem Factors

Although extensive research on sexual violence and bystander intervention has examined the influence of individual and microsystem factors, less is known about the exosystem. The exosystem refers to events and features within one's community—aspects of the immediate setting that profoundly surround and influence the embedded individuals (Banyard, 2011; Bronfenbrenner, 2005). We focus here on two exosystem-level factors related to MSA: sexual assault training exposure and trust in the military sexual assault system.

Sexual Assault Training Exposure

Education around sexual violence may help cultivate recognition and awareness, which are necessary preconditions to bystander intervention (e.g., Banyard, 2011). Indeed, college students who participate in sexual assault awareness training report greater active bystander behaviors (Banyard, 2008). Another study, which adapted a bystander intervention program for the military, found that the program increased participants' confidence in acting as a bystander (Potter & Stapleton, 2012). In the military, SAPRO requires all Service members to undergo regular training for MSA prevention and response (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2013). However, recent research using the military's own data suggests that delivery, dosage, and content of these trainings may not be consistent across Service members and branches (Holland, Rabelo & Cortina, 2014). Thus, exposure to MSA training is variable, and bystander intentions may reflect this variability. We expect that exposure to more comprehensive sexual assault education will be associated with a greater likelihood to engage in bystander behavior.

Trust in the Military Sexual Assault System

Although less research has been conducted at the exosystem level, some research suggests that a greater sense of trust in the community can promote helping behavior

(Banyard, 2011). Trust is an important facet of the military context: women and men serve on active duty with the expectation that they can rely upon fellow Service members, leaders, and institutional systems to protect them from harm. The theory of institutional betrayal identifies the loss of trust and commitment that can occur among community members when an institution fails to prevent and respond appropriately to sexual violence (Smith & Freyd, 2014). For instance, trust in the military sexual assault system reflects employees' confidence in the military's ability to ensure victims' privacy, dignity, and safety after an assault. If Service members do not trust the institution to respond to these behaviors, they may be less likely to place themselves in the (potentially dangerous) position to step in as a bystander—if the institution does not care, why should they? We put this possibility to an empirical test, examining how trust in the military system relates to bystander intentions.

Study Summary

This study revolves around two primary research questions: (a) What predicts assumption of responsibility for sexual violence bystander intervention? (b) What predicts specific bystander intervention approaches (i.e., confronting the perpetrator, assisting the victim, or finding someone to help)? We consider predictors across multiple layers of the military ecosystem: intrapersonal (gender, personal beliefs about military sexual assault), microsystem (rank, morale), and exosystem (MSA training exposure, trust in the system). We hypothesize that the following will predict greater assumption of responsibility to intervene: identification as a woman, belief that sexual assault is a problem, officer rank, high unit morale, high training exposure, and greater trust in the military sexual assault system. Research Question 2 takes us into uncharted territory, with little prior work examining specific bystander actions that could inform directional hypotheses; we therefore opted to leave that question exploratory.

Method

Participants and Procedure

We analyzed data collected by the DoD: the 2010 Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Active Duty Members (2010 WGRA). This survey was designed to sample even numbers of individuals across gender, race/ethnicity, and Service branch. Approximately 90,391 active duty members received the survey (either online or on paper), and 26,505 (29.32%) provided usable data (Defense

Manpower Data Center, 2010). For details on these procedures, see Defense Manpower Data Center (2010) and Rock, Lipari, Cook and Hale (2011).

We analyzed data from Junior Enlisted personnel (E1–E4, n = 8351, 33.9%), Senior Enlisted members (E5–E9, n = 8937; 36.3%), Junior Officers (O1–O3, n = 3981; 16.2%), and Senior Officers (O4–O6, n = 3341; 13.6%) for a sample size of n = 24,610.[1] This sample included 57.4% men and 42.6% women. There was representation of all Service branches: 28.3% Air Force, 22.3% Army, 20.8% Navy, 19.6% Marine Corps, and 9% Coast Guard.

Measures

Bystander Intentions

In their surveys, participants read a short scenario that could potentially develop into an alcohol-involved sexual assault:

> Suppose you see a female Service member, who you do not know very well, getting drunk at a party. Someone tells you that a guy from your work group is going to lead her off to have sex. What are you most likely to do in this kind of situation?

After the scenario, participants could mark one (and only one) of the following possible responses (a) *Do nothing*, (b) *Leave to avoid any kind of trouble*, (c) *Find someone who knows the woman and can help her*, (d) *Talk to the woman/try to get her out of the situation*, (e) *Stop the guy from leaving with the woman*, and (f) *Other action*. We collapsed options one (*Nothing*) and two (*Leave*), given that both responses reflect inaction. Additionally, we excluded the sixth option (*Other action*), due to ambiguity. Thus, we examined four possible responses to this scenario: (a) *Do nothing* (Nothing or Leave), (b) *Get Help* (Find someone who knows the woman and can help her), (c) *Help the Victim* (Talk to the woman/try to get her out of the situation), and (d) *Stop the Perpetrator* (Stop the guy from leaving with the woman).

Gender

Participants could identify as either *Male* (coded 0) or *Female* (coded 1). When this item was left blank, analysts at the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) imputed participants' gender from their personal records.

[1] Rank groups were created by DoD WGRA administrators, and they follow norms established in the literature (e.g., Schaller et al., 2014). We excluded data from n = 1895 Warrant Officers, given their small numbers and ambiguous power in the larger military hierarchy.

Beliefs About Sexual Assault in the Military

Service members were asked, "In your opinion, has sexual assault in the military become more or less of a problem over the last 4 years?" The response options for this item included, 1 = *Less of a problem today*, 2 = *About the same as 4 years ago*, and 3 = *More of a problem today*.

Rank

Defense Manpower Data Center administrators used personnel records to determine participants' rank (*E1–E4, E5–E9, O1–O3,* or *O4–O6*). We created three dummy codes, with *Junior Enlisted* as the reference group (i.e., *Senior Enlisted* = 1 and *Junior Enlisted* = 0; *Junior Officer* = 1 and *Junior Enlisted* = 0; *Senior Officer* = 1; and *Junior Enlisted* = 0).

Unit Morale

Two items were used to assess morale. Participants were asked "Overall, how would you rate...the current level of morale in *your unit*?" and "...*Your* current level of morale" on a five point scale from 1 = *Very low* to 5 = *Very high* (r = .70).

Sexual Assault Training Exposure

Service members who indicated that they had received sexual assault training in the last 12 months (n = 21,846) rated their training on ten different content areas. Example content areas include "Provides a good understanding of what actions are considered sexual assault," "Explains the reporting options available if a sexual assault occurs," and "Teaches how to intervene when you witness a situation involving a fellow Service member (bystander intervention)." The stem for these items read, "My Service's sexual assault training..." and response options ranged from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*. We averaged these items to yield a single measure of training exposure (α = .98).

Trust in the Military Sexual Assault System

Three items measured participants' trust in the military sexual assault system. The stem read, "If you are sexually assaulted, you can trust the military system to...," and the three items were: "protect your privacy," "ensure your safety following the incident," and "treat you with dignity and respect." The response options were *True, False,* or *Don't know*. We followed the procedures created by Smith, Kendall, and Hulin (1969) to analyze and score the "Don't know" response. First, the response options were coded 1 = *False,* 2 = *Don't know,* and 3 = *True*.

Table 1 Actions taken in response to the scenario by gender and rank

	Do nothing or leave n (%)	Get help n (%)	Help the victim n (%)	Stop the perpetrator n (%)
Women	154 (1.7)	2154 (23.1)	3968 (42.5)	3055 (32.7)
Men	684 (5.6)	4271 (35.1)	1879 (15.4)	5334 (43.8)
Junior Enlisted	442 (6.3)	1917 (27.3)	2098 (29.8)	2573 (36.6)
Senior Enlisted	255 (3.2)	2105 (26.8)	2100 (26.7)	3399 (43.2)
Junior Officer	95 (2.7)	1298 (36.3)	942 (26.4)	1239 (34.7)
Senior Officer	46 (1.5)	1105 (36.4)	707 (23.3)	1178 (38.8)

Table 2 Means, standard deviations, and correlations for continuous variables

Variables	Mean (SD)	Range	1	2	3	4
1. Belief sexual assault is a problem	1.86 (0.74)	1–3	–			
2. Unit morale	3.24 (0.98)	1–5	−.15	–		
3. Training exposure	4.48 (0.65)	1–5	−.09	.21	–	
4. Trust in the system	7.21 (2.84)	0–9	−.16	.24	.37	–

SD, standard deviation. All p's < .001

Second, we summed all three items to yield a total score. Next, we created two groups with a mean split: Low Trust and High Trust. Finally, we ran a series of chi-square tests to determine whether the "Don't know" responses were more likely to fall into the Low Trust group or High Trust group. Participants who responded "Don't know" were overwhelmingly classified in the Low Trust group (e.g., for "ensure your safety", 97.7% of respondents who selected "Don't know" fell into Low Trust), which indicated that this response option should receive a more negative weighting. Thus, following the scoring procedure described in Smith et al. (1969), we coded *False* = 0, *Don't know* = 1, *True* = 3. These items were then summed to give a total trust score from 0 to 9 (α = .87).

Results

Descriptive Results

In response to the scenario, 3.6% (n = 838) said they would do nothing or leave to avoid trouble, 27.5% (n = 6425) would get someone who knows the victim to help her, 25.0% (n = 5847) would help the victim directly or remove her from the situation, and 35.9% (n = 8389) would stop the perpetrator. The other respondents who answered this question indicated that they would take some "other action" (8%, n = 1866).[2] See Table 1 for a descriptive breakdown of the actions taken by gender and rank, and Table 2 for means, standard deviations, and correlations.

RQ1: What Factors Predict Assuming Responsibility for Intervention?

We conducted a logistic regression analysis to determine factors that predict taking bystander action (coded as 1; this included getting help, helping/removing the victim, or

stopping the perpetrator) versus doing nothing or leaving (coded as 0) in response to the sexual assault scenario. The independent variables entered in the model were gender (*women* = 1; *men* = 0), belief that sexual assault is a problem in the military (continuous), rank (three dummy codes: *Senior Enlisted* = 1 and *Junior Enlisted* = 0; *Junior Officer* = 1 and *Junior Enlisted* = 0; *Senior Officer* = 1 and *Junior Enlisted* = 0), unit morale (continuous), training exposure (continuous), and trust in the military sexual assault system (continuous).[3] Due to our large sample size, we used a more stringent criterion ($p \leq .001$) to determine statistical significance—a practice advocated by other researchers analyzing large DoD datasets (e.g., Langhout et al., 2005). Results appear in Table 3.

The full model was significant, χ^2 (8, N = 12,672) = 322.31, p < .001, which indicates that the model was able to differentiate between those who assumed personal responsibility and those who did not. The model correctly classified 97% of the cases. The amount of variance explained ranged from 2.5% (*Cox and Snell R Square*) to 11.6% (*Nagelkerke R Square*). Women were almost six times more likely to take action than men (Exp(B) = 5.98, p < .001). Compared to Junior Enlisted members, Senior Enlisted were almost twice as likely to act (Exp(B) = 1.85, p < .001), Junior Officers were over twice as likely (Exp(B) = 2.42, p < .001), and Senior Officers were over three times more likely (Exp(B) = 3.75, p < .001). Higher unit morale was also associated with greater likelihood to take action (Exp(B) = 1.30, p < .001). Additionally, as participants reported increased exposure to sexual assault training (Exp(B) = 1.58, p < .001) and greater trust in the military sexual assault system (Exp(B) = 1.13, p < .001), they were more likely to assume responsibility and take action. Using our more stringent p-value criterion, belief that

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[2] These participants did not provide the exact action they would take, and as a result, they were not included in any of the subsequent analyses.

[3] As a follow-up analysis, we ran all models with interactions between gender and the other independent variables. However, none of the interactions (either entered into the models together as a set or alone) were significant at our p-value criterion. This suggests that factors like exposure to training or trust were equally predictive for both women and men.

Table 3 Logistic regression predicting assumption of responsibility for bystander intervention

Predictor	β	SE	Wald χ²	df	p	Exp(B)	95% CI
Gender	1.79	0.17	108.60	1	.001	5.98	[4.27, 8.37]
Belief sexual assault is a problem	0.18	0.08	5.10	1	.024	1.20	[1.02, 1.40]
Sr. Enlisted v Jr. Enlisted	0.62	0.17	14.05	1	.001	1.85	[1.34, 2.56]
Jr. Officer v Jr. Enlisted	0.88	0.22	16.61	1	.001	2.42	[1.58, 3.69]
Sr. Officer v Jr. Enlisted	1.32	0.23	33.94	1	.001	3.75	[2.40, 5.84]
Unit morale	0.27	0.06	17.84	1	.001	1.30	[1.15, 1.47]
Training exposure	0.46	0.08	30.58	1	.001	1.58	[1.34, 1.85]
Trust in the system	0.12	0.02	39.09	1	.001	1.13	[1.09, 1.17]

CI, confidence interval. Men and Junior Enlisted are the reference category (coded as 0).

sexual assault is a problem in the military was unrelated to bystander action.

RQ2: What Factors Predict Specific Bystander Intervention Approach?

We ran three logistic regressions to determine the factors that predicted what actions Service members chose to take in response to the sexual assault scenario. Again, the independent variables entered in the model included gender, belief that sexual assault is a problem in the military, rank, unit morale, training exposure, and trust in the military sexual assault system. This analysis only included cases where respondents had indicated that they were "most likely to do" one of the three intervention responses: getting help, helping/removing the victim, or stopping the perpetrator ($n = 20,661$). All results appear in Table 4.

Indirect Action: Getting Help

The first model predicted the choice of an indirect bystander strategy—find someone to help the victim (coded as 1) versus another, more direct bystander strategy (either helping/removing the victim or stopping the perpetrator, coded as 0). The full model was significant, χ^2 (8, $N = 12,336$) = 483.86, $p < .001$, indicating that the model was able to differentiate between those who chose to get help and those who selected another action. The model correctly classified 70% of the cases. The amount of variance explained ranged from 3.8% (*Cox and Snell R Square*) to 5.4% (*Nagelkerke R Square*). Men were more likely to choose to find someone to help the victim (Exp (B) = 0.49, $p < .001$) than women. Additionally, beliefs

Table 4 Logistic regression predicting specific bystander intervention method

	β	SE	Wald χ²	df	p	Exp(B)	95% CI
Predicting getting help							
Gender	−0.72	0.04	262.46	1	.001	0.49	[0.45, 0.53]
Belief sexual assault is a problem	−0.13	0.03	23.15	1	.001	0.87	[0.83, 0.92]
Sr. Enlisted v Jr. Enlisted	−0.11	0.08	2.01	1	.156	0.90	[0.77, 1.04]
Jr. Officer v Jr. Enlisted	0.30	0.09	11.84	1	.001	1.35	[1.14, 1.60]
Sr. Officer v Jr. Enlisted	0.27	0.09	9.84	1	.002	1.31	[1.11, 1.55]
Unit morale	−0.05	0.02	3.77	1	.052	0.96	[0.91, 1.00]
Training exposure	−0.21	0.04	36.97	1	.001	0.81	[0.75, 0.87]
Trust in the system	−0.03	0.01	11.38	1	.001	0.97	[0.96, 0.99]
Predicting helping the victim							
Gender	1.42	0.04	1013.90	1	.001	4.12	[3.78, 4.50]
Belief sexual assault is a problem	0.01	0.03	0.07	1	.789	1.01	[0.95, 1.07]
Sr. Enlisted v Jr. Enlisted	−0.04	0.08	0.30	1	.581	0.96	[0.82, 1.12]
Jr. Officer v Jr. Enlisted	−0.15	0.09	2.80	1	.094	0.86	[0.72, 1.03]
Sr. Officer v Jr. Enlisted	−0.14	0.09	2.47	1	.116	0.87	[0.73, 1.04]
Unit morale	0.02	0.02	0.58	1	.447	1.02	[0.97, 1.07]
Training exposure	0.01	0.04	0.04	1	.851	1.01	[0.93, 1.09]
Trust in the system	0.01	0.01	0.02	1	.899	1.00	[0.99, 1.02]
Predicting stopping the perpetrator							
Gender	−0.58	0.04	209.66	1	.001	0.56	[0.52, 0.61]
Belief sexual assault is a problem	0.11	0.03	17.54	1	.001	1.11	[1.06, 1.17]
Sr. Enlisted v Jr. Enlisted	0.13	0.07	3.31	1	.069	1.14	[0.99, 1.31]
Jr. Officer v Jr. Enlisted	−0.15	0.08	3.28	1	.070	0.86	[0.74, 1.01]
Sr. Officer v Jr. Enlisted	−0.13	0.08	2.81	1	.094	0.88	[0.75, 1.02]
Unit morale	0.02	0.02	1.25	1	.264	1.02	[0.98, 1.07]
Training exposure	0.19	0.03	30.47	1	.001	1.20	[1.13, 1.29]
Trust in the system	0.02	0.01	8.58	1	.003	1.02	[1.01, 1.04]

CI, confidence interval. Men and Junior Enlisted are the reference category (coded as 0).

that sexual assault is a problem in the military was a negative predictor of this intervention; in other words, Service members who thought sexual assault is *less* of a problem were *more* likely to find someone else to help the victim (Exp(B) = 0.87, $p < .001$) compared to direct intervention. Senior Enlisted members were no more or less likely to choose this intervention strategy, but Junior Officers were more likely to choose to find help (Exp(B) = 1.35, $p < .001$) than Junior Enlisted personnel (and a similar trend was found for Senior Officers). Additionally, with every one unit decrease in exposure to sexual assault training and trust in the system, Service members were more likely to choose this indirect bystander strategy ((Exp(B) = 0.81, $p < .001$) and (Exp(B) = 0.97, $p < .001$), respectively). In other words, those who had *less* training and trust were *more* likely to find someone else to help the victim rather than insert themselves into the situation directly.

Direct Action: Helping/Removing the Victim

Our second model predicted Service members' decisions to help the victim directly (coded as 1) versus another intervention (either finding someone *else* to help the victim or stopping the perpetrator, coded as 0). The full model was significant, χ^2 (8, $N = 12,336$) = 1161.85, $p < .001$, which indicates that the model was able to differentiate between those chose to help the victim and those who selected another strategy. The model correctly classified 73% of the cases. The amount of variance explained ranged from 9.0% (*Cox and Snell R Square*) to 13.1% (*Nagelkerke R Square*). Women, compared to men, were over four times more likely to choose to directly help the victim (Exp(B) = 4.12, $p < .001$). No other predictor had a significant impact on intention to intervene with the victim directly.

Direct Action: Stopping the Perpetrator

Our final model predicted Service members' decisions to stop the perpetrator directly (coded as 1) versus another bystander action (coded as 0). The full model was significant, χ^2 (8, $N = 12,336$) = 346.20, $p < .001$, which indicates that the model was able to differentiate between those who chose to confront the perpetrator and those who chose another intervention approach. The model correctly classified 60% of the cases, which was lower than the other models. Additionally, the amount of variance explained ranged from 2.8% (*Cox and Snell R Square*) to 3.7% (*Nagelkerke R Square*). Men, compared to women, were more likely to choose to confront the perpetrator (Exp(B) = 0.56, $p < .001$). Those who believed that sexual assault is a problem in the military were also significantly more likely to intervene directly with the perpetrator (Exp(B) = 1.11,

$p < .001$). Additionally, greater exposure to sexual assault training (Exp(B) = 1.20, $p < .001$) predicted greater use of this direct strategy. Rank and unit morale were not significant predictors of this action, and trust in the system did not meet our more stringent p-value cutoff.

Discussion

Military sexual assault (MSA) is a serious and widespread problem, affecting thousands of Service women and men each year (National Defense Research Institute, 2014). One strategy adopted by the DoD to help prevent sexual assault is bystander education and intervention. Drawing on an ecological model, we sought to understand bystander decision-making among active duty military personnel. When asked how they would respond to a potential alcohol-involved sexual assault scenario, the majority stated that they would take some action. Approximately one quarter would help the female victim directly or get someone who knows the victim to help her, and just over one-third would confront the male perpetrator. We investigated factors that predict these various intervention strategies. Simply put: who intervenes in military sexual assault, how do they intervene, and what promotes those intervention decisions?

Intrapersonal Factors: Gender and Beliefs About Sexual Assault in the Military

For our first level of analysis, we examined two intrapersonal factors: gender and beliefs about MSA. Mirroring prior research (e.g., Banyard, 2008, 2011; Burn, 2009), women compared to men were nearly six times more likely to state that they would take some bystander action in response to the sexual assault scenario. Women, compared to men, hold heightened awareness and fear of sexual violence (e.g., Brownmiller, 1975; Buchwald, Fletcher & Roth, 1993). These fears are often well-founded, especially in the military: Service women are approximately twenty times more likely to be raped than Service men (National Defense Research Institute, 2014). Women are also less accepting of rape myths, such as "only bad girls get raped" (e.g., Burt, 1980; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). All of these factors could create a consciousness that enables women to notice and interpret sexual assault as a problem, which is a necessary prerequisite of bystander behavior (Bancroft, Long & McCabe, 2011).

In addition, women were four times more likely to indicate that they would help the victim directly. Men, on the other hand, were more likely to state that they would confront the perpetrator directly or find someone to help the victim. Other research finds that college men are more

likely to engage in more risky and direct active bystander behavior (e.g., directly confronting the perpetrator; Chabot et al., 2009). One reason for this might be gendered social power, within society at large and the military. Women are the numerical minority: fewer than one in six Service members are women (although these figures vary by branch; for example, women comprise 20% of Air Force personnel yet just 6% of Marines; Department of Defense, 2013). The military's organizational culture also prizes masculinity over femininity (Zurbriggen, 2010). Moreover, women are more likely to experience MSA and men are more likely to commit sexual assault—against both women and men (Zurbriggen, 2010). Thus, women may be more hesitant to directly confront the (usually male) perpetrator (Potter & Stapleton, 2012). Men, on the other hand, may have more social leeway to "call out" or confront another man.

Gender differences in bystander intentions might also derive from the nature of bystander sexual assault training currently offered in the military. For instance, a video used in a DoD campaign called "Bystander Intervention—Bar Scene" depicts different roles for women and men. In this training video, women are portrayed as helping a (female) victim directly, by attempting to "get her away from here." Men, on the other hand, are portrayed as confronting the (male) perpetrator, stating that they were going to stop him from doing "something stupid" (Department of Defense Sexual Assault Prevention and Response, 2010). Training materials such as this tacitly suggest that women and men have different responsibilities when they witness a potential sexual assault in the making. Such messages could have both benefits (promoting certain kinds of bystander actions) and harms (undermining other actions).

Prior research suggests that women, compared to men, may be more likely to intervene in indirect ways (Eagly & Crowley, 1986; Sylaska & Walters, 2014). However, we found that men were more likely to state that they would take indirect action: by finding someone else who knows the woman to help her. Perhaps this finding arises from social expectations and norms within a male-dominated context. Fabiano, Perkins, Berkowitz, Linkenbach and Stark (2003) found that men tended to underestimate the likelihood that male peers would serve as active bystanders and overestimate the likelihood that female peers would take action. Furthermore, men were more likely to serve as active bystanders when they believed that other men would do the same. Thus, some men in our sample may have been hesitant to step in directly—whether that was to help the victim or confront the perpetrator.

Global beliefs about military sexual assault predicted the specific nature of bystander intention. Service members who thought sexual assault is *less* of a problem in the military were more likely to indicate that they would find someone else to help the victim (indirect intervention). Conversely, Service members who thought military sexual assault was *more* problematic were more likely to state that they would stop the perpetrator directly. These findings echo prior research, which suggests that people endorsing dismissive attitudes about sexual assault are less likely to engage in active bystander behavior (e.g., Banyard, 2008). This speaks to the need for sexual assault awareness training. If the military (or any other organization) seeks to motivate its members to intervene and interrupt sexual violence, it must educate those members on the gravity of that violence.

Microsystem Factors: Rank and Unit Morale

For our second level of analysis, we examined two elements of the microsystem: rank and unit morale. With respect to rank, as power increased, Service members were more likely to endorse bystander intervention: compared to Junior Enlisted members, Senior Enlisted were almost twice as likely to act (as opposed to "doing nothing"), and Junior and Senior Officers were over two and three times as likely to act, respectively. However, the specific behavioral strategies selected by some Officers were indirect and passive: Junior Officers were more likely to state that they would find someone to help the victim compared to Junior Enlisted members. There were also no significant differences between Enlisted personnel and Officers on either of the direct bystander actions (e.g., confronting the perpetrator). Prior research has emphasized the importance of leaders who model appropriate, effective, and active bystander behaviors (e.g., Banyard et al., 2004). When leaders serve as exemplary bystanders, others are more likely to serve as active bystanders in the future (Batson, 1998; Myers, 1999). Although Officers possess more institutional power, these results suggest that they are not more likely to use this power to intervene directly. Lower ranking Service members are significantly more likely to suffer MSA (e.g., Harned et al., 2002; Surís & Lind, 2008); therefore, it is crucial that leaders are equipped to step in and respond effectively to sexual assault. Prior research finds that bystander intervention education programs are more effective when targeted toward high-status individuals (McMahon, 2015). When leaders effectively promote a climate of safety and trust in their units, Service members may feel more comfortable taking on active bystanders roles.

In addition to rank, unit morale also emerged as a significant microsystem predictor. Service members who reported high morale in their unit were more likely to state that they would intervene in a MSA. This finding mirrors research in college contexts—where cohesion among groups is associated with more willingness to

intervene and engage in direct bystander action (McMahon & Farmer, 2009; Rutkowski et al., 1983). Our findings demonstrate that community morale is important to consider in military settings as well, suggesting that efforts to expand and improve active bystander training should consider not only military culture but also cultures in individual units. Related research finds that unit norms can affect sexual violence; even when an organization at large publicly condemns sexual violence, individual units may be more or less tolerant of sexual violence, especially when rigid organizational hierarchies are in place (Murdoch, Pryor, Polusny, Gackstetter & Ripley, 2009). Again, military leaders may play a role in this, as they are generally responsible for the climate and welfare of their unit (DoD, 2014). If unit leaders have successfully established a climate of safety, trust, dignity, and morale, then personnel may feel more comfortable coming forward with issues and incident reports.

Exosystem Factors: Sexual Assault Training Exposure and Trust in the System

For our third level of analysis, we examined two aspects of the exosystem: exposure to sexual assault training and trust in the military sexual assault system. First, we found that exposure to more comprehensive MSA awareness training was linked with a greater likelihood to intervene in any way, and greater likelihood to engage in a direct bystander strategy. Similarly, Service members with greater trust in the military system were more likely to state that they would take action in response to the sexual assault scenario; they were also less likely to choose an indirect bystander strategy (finding someone to help). Our findings stress the importance of implementing high-quality military training for active bystander behavior. In particular, it might be most beneficial for training to cover a wide range of topics related to sexual assault—including specific actions bystanders can take—and educate Service members about specific sexual assault policies and practices. Additionally, the military must ensure that sexual assault response systems can be trusted (e.g., protecting victims' privacy, treating victims with dignity and respect). These messages about the (un)acceptability of sexual assault may be critical for changing attitudes, norms, and actions around sexual assault in the military.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Stakeholders invested in sexual violence prevention have called for the development of evidence-based bystander education programs (e.g., Banyard & Moynihan, 2011). Consistent with ecological models, our results suggest that bystander interventions must be sensitive to the communities in which perpetrators, victims, and bystanders are embedded. We offer the following recommendations for improving sexual violence bystander education in the military:

1. *Do not reify gender stereotypes within training.* The bystander intervention video described above demonstrates subtle ways that training materials may reinforce beliefs about who is a "victim" and who is a "perpetrator" of sexual violence, and the differing roles that women and men should play in stopping violence. It is important that education surrounding gender-based violence *not* reinforce beliefs that equate maleness with dominance and aggressiveness and femaleness with subordination and submissiveness. Efforts to de-couple military culture from hegemonic and stereotypic ideas of masculinity and femininity may offer benefits to both women and men. Above and beyond the aim of reducing sexual assault, all Service members may benefit from the freedom to outwardly express care and compassion toward their comrades (Flood, 2011). Training efforts should not simply discuss sexual assault as a discrete event, but rather part and parcel of larger rape culture that pervades U.S. society. Some women and men may not feel safe intervening directly to stop MSA, fearing that they themselves will be victimized. Addressing this aspect of rape culture could expand the purview of bystander strategies (e.g., indirect methods) for those who do not feel safe confronting perpetrators directly.

2. *Incorporate socio-cultural information about sexual violence.* Similarly, efforts to reduce sexual violence may be more successful if parallel efforts are made to address larger ideologies and social norms about sexual assault (e.g., Banyard et al., 2004, 2007; Coker et al., 2014). Many Service members may be unaware of the true prevalence and consequences of MSA, and they may also endorse stereotypical yet inaccurate information about sexual violence. Attitude change related to sexual violence ideologies and rape myths can foster a bystander's sense of responsibility and self-efficacy for intervening. Thus, enhanced education about sexual violence that includes information about social norms, rape myths, and cultural ideologies may help to encourage more direct bystander intervention.

3. *Involve leaders to (re)shape organizational culture.* Leaders are crucial in preventing and responding to sexual violence, given their capacity to influence the ideologies and behaviors of their subordinates; this is especially important in work cultures strongly rooted in hierarchy, such as the military. Military leaders are generally responsible for the climate and welfare of their units (DoD, 2014), so they must be actively engaged in

order to adequately implement policies related to MSA. While it is encouraging that Senior Enlisted members and Officers were more likely to state they would take some action, we also found that Officers were more likely to take indirect bystander action. Furthermore, other research shows some leaders to perpetuate aspects of rape culture through their use of gendered derogatory language and acceptance of jokes that glorify violence against women (Schmid, 2010). This is deeply problematic, because sexist, hostile environments are known to fuel sexual violence (e.g., Bostock & Daley, 2007; Firestone et al., 2012; Harned et al., 2002). Similarly, tolerance for sexual violence in a given context suppresses bystanders' willingness to intervene (Brown & Messman-Moore, 2010). These findings call for greater accountability and training of leaders, which could also enhance unit morale. Focusing on leaders may also improve military culture more generally, a necessary step in order to fully prevent MSA.

4. *Conduct rigorous evaluations of sexual assault prevention/response trainings.* Little prior research has evaluated military sexual assault education programs—including programs that aim to increase bystander behavior. Greater empirical evidence is needed in order to understand the content, effectiveness, and impact of these programs. We found that those who were exposed to less comprehensive training were less likely to intervene. This demonstrates the need for consistent, high-quality training for all Service members.

It is important that efforts to design, implement, and evaluate bystander intervention trainings be evidence-based. The following best practices have emerged from prior research: administer more than one training session; use diverse pedagogical strategies; include information about different forms of sexual violence; teach specific intervention strategies that can be enacted before, during, and after an assault; avoid characterizing all women as victims and all men as perpetrators; and acknowledge that both men and women suffer sexual violence (e.g., Banyard, Plante & Moynihan, 2005; Banyard et al., 2004, 2007). We would advise that bystander training programs also be sensitive to ecology, or the social context in which actors are embedded.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although based on a large and diverse sample, this study has limitations. First, we conducted secondary data analysis of a survey administered at a single time point. There are more comprehensive measures of attitudes about sexual assault (e.g., rape myth acceptance) that would be important to examine, but we were limited by the measures included in the survey. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of these data precludes assessments of change over time or conclusions about causal associations in the data. As suggested above, future research should implement rigorous evaluations of bystander intervention training, using a combination of experimental and longitudinal designs and analyses (e.g., randomized control trials). In addition, some of the effect sizes in the current study were relatively small; that said, even effects of small magnitude can be deeply meaningful (e.g., J. M. Cortina & Landis, 2011; Prentice & Miller, 1992). Moreover, other effects were quite large, such as women being almost six times more likely than men to assume responsibility for bystander intervention.

In addition, we examined bystander behavioral intentions in response to a single hypothetical scenario. The scenario included in the 2010 WGRA may be a common one; however, people may respond differently depending on the details of the scenario (e.g., if it involved a male victim, if the assault was already underway, if the victim and perpetrator were Enlisted members or Officers, if there was no alcohol involved). Additionally, participants were provided a list of ways to respond and instructed to choose just one, which may not fully represent the possible range of bystander interventions that Service members may take. Participants who chose to stop the perpetrator were not classified as well as the other interventions, which also suggests the importance of more in-depth examination of other bystander intervention techniques. Further research is needed to understand bystander actions in response to a wide variety of sexual assault situations—before, during, and after the assault.

Finally, another limitation involves the lack of information about the bystander education programs delivered to Service members. Some research suggests that the effectiveness of bystander training can depend on factors such as content, length, and delivery setting (e.g., Alegría-Flores, Raker, Pleasants, Weaver & Weinberger, 2015; Coker et al., 2011). One bystander intervention training was found to be less effective for men in a college primarily serving male students (Cares et al., 2015). This finding would be important to examine in the context of the military, an extremely male-dominated setting. More research is needed to understand the content of military bystander training efforts and the effectiveness of these efforts—for example, in increasing bystander behavior, improving outcomes for MSA survivors, and decreasing the prevalence of MSA.

Conclusion

Many Service members endure sexual aggression and assault during their military careers, carrying disastrous

consequences to their wellbeing. Although the military has increased efforts to prevent and respond to MSA—including promotion of bystander intervention—less is known about the effectiveness of these efforts. Using an ecological model, we identified factors that shape bystander decision-making in sexual assault situations. More research is needed to understand how, when, and why people intervene (and fail to intervene) as active bystanders to forestall sexual violence.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest

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