Understanding Motives and Barriers to Bystander Intervention for Preventing Sexual Harassment: A Value-Expectancy Approach

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Abstract

Sexual harassment remains a persistent concern on college campuses, despite the widespread implementation of bystander intervention (BI) programs. Grounded in the Reasoned Action Approach (RAA) and value-expectancy theory, this study explored the beliefs that influence students' intentions to engage in BI to prevent sexual harassment. In Phase 1, salient behavioral, normative, and control beliefs were identified through open-ended responses from a sample of undergraduate students (n = 63) at a Western U.S. university. These themes informed the development of belief-based, value-weighted items aligned with RAA constructs. In Phase 2, a separate sample (n = 196) completed a questionnaire assessing generalized and belief-level RAA constructs. Correlational analyses revealed that feeling proud to help others (r = .44) and educating others by example (r = .42) were the strongest predictors of positive attitudes toward BI. Survivors of sexual harassment (r = .42) were the most influential injunctive referents, and peers of similar age (r = .33) were the strongest descriptive referents. The most significant perceived barrier was lack of peer support (r = .41). These findings suggest that targeting salient prosocial values and referent groups in BI programming may enhance student engagement in efforts to prevent sexual harassment.

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Introduction

Sexual violence, including sexual harassment, rape, sexual assault, or sexual abuse, remains a persistent concern on college campuses across the United States, despite the proliferation of prevention efforts. Sexual harassment can include unwanted sexual comments, gestures, or actions based on an individual's gender, gender expression, or sexual orientation (Burn, 2019). Alarmingly, nearly 42% of college students report having experienced sexual harassment (Mellins et al., 2017). Such experiences are associated with negative psychological and academic outcomes, including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), substance use, diminished academic satisfaction, and feelings of institutional betrayal (Huerta et al., 2006; McGinley et al., 2016; Platt et al., 2009; Wolff et al., 2017).

A prominent strategy to address campus-based sexual violence is the promotion of bystander intervention (BI) programs. These initiatives aim to equip students with the awareness, motivation, and skills needed to intervene safely and effectively in high-risk situations (Mainwaring et al., 2023). The decision to intervene, however, is multifaceted. Bystanders must first recognize the problematic situation, assess the need for intervention, feel a sense of responsibility,

believe they have the skills to act, and, ultimately, choose to engage (John et al., 2022; Mainwaring et al., 2023).

Understanding the psychological drivers of these decisions is critical to improving BI effectiveness. The Reasoned Action Approach (RAA) offers a robust framework for examining the determinants of behavior via intentions and perceived behavioral control (*NOTE: PBC often acts as a proxy for actual control, since measures of actual control for most behaviors are not available) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010, p. 21; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Hagger, 2019). According to the RAA, intentions are shaped by three constructs: attitudes toward the behavior, perceived norms (including both injunctive and descriptive norms), and perceived behavioral control (PBC). These constructs, in turn, are underpinned by specific beliefs. The value-expectancy model posits that attitudes arise from an individual's evaluation of the likely outcomes of a behavior and the value placed on those outcomes (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010, p. 96). Similarly, perceived norms reflect beliefs about the expectations of important referents, weighted by motivation to comply or identify with them, while PBC reflects beliefs about facilitating or inhibiting factors, weighted by their perceived influence (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). Together, these belief-based mechanisms can reveal not only whether individuals are likely to intervene, but also why they may—or may not—choose to do so.

Despite the widespread application of BI programs, limited research has applied the full value-expectancy framework to understand the specific beliefs that shape students' attitudes, norms, and control perceptions regarding BI to prevent sexual harassment. Identifying these beliefs can provide critical insights for tailoring interventions to strengthen motivations and reduce barriers to action.

The purpose of this study was twofold:

1. To elicit the most salient behavioral, normative, and control beliefs college students hold about engaging in BI to prevent sexual harassment.

2. To examine the strength of association between these beliefs—operationalized through value-expectancy composites—and their corresponding generalized RAA constructs.

Methods

Part 1: Elicitation of Beliefs

Undergraduate students from a university in the Western U.S. in introductory level general education courses were recruited to complete a questionnaire through Qualtrics, an online questionnaire platform. All students were 18 to 25 years old. Research activities were approved by the sponsoring university's Institutional Review Board.

According to Fishbein and Ajzen (2010), an elicitation of beliefs should be done with a small sample of individuals from the target population. Students were first asked to complete an informed consent form; those who consented were next provided the definitions of BI and sexual harassment (Burn, 2019):

BI: A third-party witness intervening to stop or prevent sexual assault/harassment from occurring.

Sexual Harassment (SH): Unwanted sexual comments, gestures, or actions targeting people based on their actual or perceived gender, gender expression, or sexual orientation (Burn, 2019).
--Common examples of sexual harassment were also given (e.g., requiring sexual favors to get rewards) or benefits (e.g., a better grade on an

assignment), unsolicited sexual advances (e.g., continued pressure to go on a date), sexist remarks (e.g., women are too emotional to be CEO's), homophobic or transphobic remarks (e.g., saying a trans woman isn't a woman because she does not have breasts), harassment committed through electronic means (e.g., emails, texts, social media), pranks of a sexual nature, stalking (e.g., keeping track of a significant other's location), and suggestive comments about a person's body (e.g., making a comment about the size of a person's butt).

Four types of beliefs were elicited using open-ended questions about using BI to prevent SH. Behavioral beliefs were elicited by tapping into instrumental attitudes (What do you see as the advantages/disadvantages of engaging in BI to prevent SH?) and experiential attitudes (What would you enjoy/hate about engaging in BI to prevent SH?). Two types of normative beliefs were elicited. First, injunctive normative beliefs: Please list the individuals or groups who would approve of you or support you/disapprove or not support you for engaging in BI to prevent SH. And second, descriptive normative beliefs: Please list the individuals or groups who you think are most likely/least likely to engage in BI to prevent SH. Finally, control beliefs were elicited: Please list any factors or circumstances that would prevent you/enable you to engage in BI to prevent SH.

A total of 63 undergraduate students completed the elicitation survey during the fall term of 2020. A team of four undergraduate research assistants and their faculty mentor (four cis gender women and a cis gender man; everyone on the team identified as White) cleaned and coded the data into categories based on the RAA constructs. Using Microsoft Excel, content analysis was carried out to identify the most

frequently discussed beliefs about BI to stop SH in line with the methodology endorsed by Fishbein & Ajzen (2010). First, the team identified beliefs in each of the RAA categories. Second, similar codes within each category were grouped together. Third, the most commonly cited salient beliefs were chosen. Data saturation was considered reached during analysis when no new ideas were uncovered.

Six prominent injunctive normative beliefs were also identified. These are the people or groups who would approve/support or disapprove/not support (my family members; my friends; survivors of sexual harassment; individuals of marginalized communities; perpetrators of sexual harassment; and people subscribing to traditional gender roles). Five prominent descriptive normative beliefs were identified. These are the people or groups most likely to approve or disapprove (students in Greek life; my friends; young adults my age; victims or friends of victims of sexual harassment; and friends of the perpetrator of sexual harassment). Finally, six prominent control beliefs were identified. These are factors or situations that would enable or prevent taking action to prevent or stop sexual harassment (the situation will be unsafe; I will be intoxicated; I will not recognize sexual harassment; I will not want to deal with the perpetrator; and I will have support of my peers). Results were used to create the RAA value-expectancy measures for the second part of the study.

Part 2: Evaluation of Value-Expectancy RAA Constructs

Study Design and Participants: The study utilized a cross-sectional survey design administered to undergraduate students at a large Western public university in the United States. Participants were recruited through university-wide email invitations and

classroom announcements. Inclusion criteria required participants to be 18 years or older and enrolled as a full-time undergraduate student. A total of 196 students completed the study.

Measures

Two types of measures were used to evaluate the value-expectancy motives and barriers for the RAA constructs: generalized-level and belief-level constructs.

Generalized-Level RAA Constructs

The generalized-level constructs of the RAA included intentions (four items), attitudes (eight items), perceived norms (including injunctive norms [three items] and descriptive norms [3 items]) and PBC (six items). All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale. Response options ranged from -3 (strong negative predisposition) to +3 (strong positive predisposition). Scales items were summated and divided by the number of items comprising the scale to give an average item score a range from -3 (strong negative predisposition) to +3 (strong positive predisposition). Cronbach α scores were used to provide a measure to evaluate the internal consistency (reliability) (intentions: α=0.93; attitudes: α=0.82; perceived norms: α=0.75; PBC: α=0.80). Example items are included on Table 1 and show the broad nature of how each item was worded. These examples follow recommendations for item-wording from Fishbein and Ajzen (2010).

Belief-Level RAA Constructs

Value expectancy questions contained both a belief question and a value-laden question (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). To gain a more accurate understanding of student beliefs related to engaging in BI to prevent sexual harassment, belief and value-based questions were created from the aforementioned elicitation of beliefs (see Part 1).

All behavioral belief items used the prominent themes identified from the elicitation of beliefs and were worded as "if/then" statements. For example:

> Behavioral Belief: In the next 3 months, if I observed sexual harassment and engaged in bystander intervention, then it will make me proud to help others. <Strongly Disagree/Strongly Agree>.

Next, a corresponding outcome evaluation item was created for each behavioral belief item. For example, for the item above:

> Outcome Evaluation: For me, being proud to help others is <Unimportant/Important>.

The same format was applied to all belief-based items, using the prominent themes identified from the elicitation of beliefs in Part 1. All example pairings can be found on Table 1.

Belief-based items were scaled from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree), while value-based items were scaled -3 (Unimportant) to +3 (Important). To interpret the value-expectancy items, each belief-based item (behavioral, injunctive normative, descriptive normative, and control beliefs) was first multiplied to its corresponding value-based item (outcome evaluation, motivation to comply, identification with a referent, and perceived power). Next, the product of each pair was individually correlated to the related generalized-level RAA construct. Therefore, all (behavioral belief x outcome evaluation) pairs were correlated with the generalized attitudes scale; all (injunctive normative belief x motivation to comply) pairs were correlated with the generalized injunctive norms scale; all (descriptive normative belief x identification with a referent) pairs were correlated with the generalized descriptive

Table 1
Example Questionnaire Items

Generalized-Level RAA Questionnaire Items

Intentions: In the next 3 months if I observe sexual harassment, I am willing to engage in bystander intervention. <Strongly Agree/Strongly Disagree>

Attitudes: In the next 3 months if I observe sexual harassment, then for me to engage in bystander intervention would be <Important/Unimportant>

Perceived Norms (Injunctive Norms): Most people who are important to me would <Strongly Approve/Strongly Disapprove> of me engaging in bystander intervention if I observed sexual harassment..

Perceived Norms (Descriptive Norms): Most people similar to me will engage in bystander intervention if they observe sexual harassment. <Strongly Agree/Strongly Disagree>

PBC: If it were entirely up to me, I am <Completely confident/Not at all confident> that I can engage in bystander intervention if I observe sexual harassment during the next 3 months.

Belief-Level RAA Questionnaire Items

Behavioral Belief: In the next 3 months, if I observed sexual harassment and engaged in bystander intervention, then it will make me proud to help others. <Strongly Disagree/Strongly Agree>
Outcome Evaluation: For me, being proud to help others is <Unimportant/Important>.

Injunctive normative belief: My close friends thinks I should engage in bystander intervention if I observe sexual harassment over the next 3 months.
Motivation to comply: I want to do what my close friends thinks I should do.

Descriptive normative belief: Most students in Greek life would engage in bystander intervention if they observed sexual harassment.
Identification with referent: I want to behave like students in Greek life.

Control belief: How often will you have the support of your peers in times when it might be necessary to engage in bystander intervention to prevent sexual harassment during the next 3 months?
Perceived Power: My peers supporting me would <Prevent me/Enable me> to engage in bystander intervention when necessary to prevent sexual harassment during the next 3 months.

norms scale; and all (control belief x perceived power) pairs were correlated using a Pearson product moment correlation (r) with the generalized PBC scale (for more details about this method, see Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010). According to Cohen (1992), the following r values will be interpreted accordingly: r = 0.10 (small effect); r = 0.30 (medium effect); r = 0.50 (large effect).

All analyses were completed using SPSS 25. Face and content validity for the questionnaire was established by an expert panel review. To predict a medium effect size, an *a priori* sample size of 98 was determined for each gender (McEachan et al., 2016).

Demographic Questions

Demographic items were at the end of both questionnaires. Students were asked to report their age in years, year in school (freshman [1st year], sophomore [2nd year], junior [3rd year], senior [4th year], or graduate student [5th year or beyond]), gender (male, female, transgender male, transgender female, genderqueer/gender non-conforming, or another identity), and race (American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, Black/African American, Middle Eastern/North African, Pacific Islander, White, Hispanic/Latinx/Spanish Origin, or Biracial/Multiracial).

Results

The following results only apply to Part 2 of the study. The average age of participants was 18.8 years (SD=1.6), and slightly over half were women (n=106; 59%), and one reported being genderqueer/gender non-conforming. There were also more underclassman (freshman [n=83; 42%]; sophomore [n=72; 37%]) compared to upperclassman (junior [n=27; 14%]; senior and grad students [n=14; 7%]). While other groups were represented (Asian [n=29; 15%];

Hispanic/Latinx/Spanish Origin [n=28; 14%]; Biracial/Multiracial [n=23; 12%]; Pacific Islander [n=3; 2%]; Middle Eastern/North African [n=3; 2%]; American Indian/Alaskan Native [n=1; 1%]; and Black/African American [n=1; 1%]), the sample was predominantly White (n=108; 55%).

Correlations between the value-expectancy pairs and generalized measures of the RAA constructs can be found in Tables 2 (attitudes), 3 (injunctive norms), 4 (descriptive norms), and 5 (PBC). For attitudes, the reported effect sizes ranged from small/medium to medium/large. "Making me proud to help others" (r=0.44; p < .001) and "educating others through example" (r=0.42; p < .001) had the strongest relationship with attitudes, while "creating a safe environment" (r=0.36; p < .001) and "preventing the situation from escalating" (r=0.35; p < .001) were also both moderately correlated. "Might result in a confrontation" (r=0.26; p < .001) and "helping to stop the sexual harassment" (r=0.17; p < .05) were both significant but had weaker correlations.

For injunctive norms, the reported effect sizes again ranged from small/medium to medium/large. However, two referents were not statistically related (perpetrators of sexual harassment [r=-0.10; p >.05] and people subscribing to traditional gender roles [r=0.08; p >.05]). The strongest injunctive normative referent was "survivors of sexual harassment" (r=0.42; p < .001). "My family member" and "my close friends" had the same associations (r=0.41; p < .001), and "individuals of marginalized communities" (r=0.31; p < .01) had the weakest, yet significant associations. Similar to injunctive norms, not all of the referents were statistically related to the descriptive norms construct. The strongest descriptive normative referent was "young adults my age" (r=0.33; p < .001). "My close friends" (r=0.27; p < .001), "students in Greek life"

Table 2

Determinants of attitudes and intentions

Behavioral Belief	Belief Strength (bb_i) (1 to 7) M (SD)	Outcome Evaluation (oe_i) (-3 to 3) M (SD)	Value-Expectancy Measure $bb_i \times oe_i$ (-21 to 21) M (SD)	Correlation $bb_i \times oe_i$ with	
				Attitudes	Intentions
Preventing the situation from escalating.	5.61 (1.2)	2.36 (1.1)	13.63 (7.1)	0.35***	0.24***
Making me proud to help others.	5.98 (1.2)	1.38 (1.8)	9.44 (11.3)	0.44***	0.17*
Educating others through example.	5.86 (1.3)	1.73 (1.5)	11.23 (9.5)	0.42***	0.32***
Helping to stop the sexual harassment.	2.69 (1.7)	0.97 (1.7)	3.18 (5.5)	0.17*	0.01
Creating a safe environment.	5.65 (1.2)	2.46 (0.9)	14.29 (6.3)	0.36***	0.34***
Might result in a confrontation.	5.16 (1.3)	0.48 (1.7)	3.09 (9.5)	0.26***	0.16*

p < .05*; p < .01**; p < .001***

Table 3

Determinants of injunctive norms and intentions

Injunctive Normative Belief	Belief Strength (inb_i) (1 to 7) M (SD)	Motivation to Comply (mtc_i) (-3 to 3) M (SD)	Composite $inb_i \times mtc_i$ (-21 to 21) M (SD)	Correlation $inb_i \times mtc_i$ with	
				Injunctive Norms	Intentions
My family members	5.90 (1.4)	1.44 (1.6)	9.70 (9.6)	0.41***	0.15*
My close Friends	6.26 (1.0)	1.60 (1.5)	10.59 (9.4)	0.41***	0.14*
Survivors of sexual harassment	6.59 (0.9)	1.86 (1.3)	12.60 (8.8)	0.42***	0.17*
Individuals of marginalized communities	6.20 (1.2)	1.58 (1.5)	10.58 (9.4)	0.31**	0.15*
Perpetrators of sexual harassment	2.87 (1.9)	-1.75 (1.9)	-2.63 (7.7)	-0.10	-0.14
People subscribing to traditional gender roles	5.17 (1.5)	0.07 (1.8)	1.90 (9.5)	0.08	0.07

p < .05*; p < .01**; p < .001***

Table 4

Determinants of descriptive norms and intentions

Descriptive Normative Belief	Belief Strength (dnb_i) (1 to 7) M (SD)	Identification with Referents (iwr_i) (-3 to 3) M (SD)	Composite $dnb_i \times iwr_i$ (-21 to 21) M (SD)	Correlation $dnb_i \times iwr_i$ with	
				Descriptive Norms	Intentions
Students in Greek life	3.81 (1.8)	-1.22 (1.8)	-2.44 (7.4)	0.16*	0.01
My close friends	5.86 (1.2)	1.55 (1.4)	9.94 (8.9)	0.27***	0.21**
Young adults my age	4.69 (1.3)	1.81 (1.3)	8.96 (7.0)	0.33***	0.20**
Victims or friends of victims of sexual harassment	5.89 (1.3)	0.99 (1.6)	6.60 (10.4)	0.14*	0.22**
Friends of the perpetrator of sexual harassment	2.75 (1.7)	-2.16 (1.4)	-4.62 (5.9)	-0.04	-0.02

Note. TPN (total perceived norms); TIN (total injunctive norms)

p < .05*; p < .01**; p < .001***

Table 5

Determinants of PBC and intentions

Control Belief	Belief Strength (cb_i) (1 to 7) M (SD)	Perceived Power (pp_i) (-3 to 3) M (SD)	Composite $cb_i \times pp_i$ (-21 to 21) M (SD)	Correlation $cb_i \times pp_i$ with	
				PBC	Intentions
The situation will be unsafe	4.78 (1.5)	0.16 (1.5)	0.27 (7.5)	0.37***	0.15*
I will be intoxicated	3.44 (1.7)	0.16 (1.7)	1.65 (6.0)	0.08	0.01
I will not recognize sexual harassment	3.64 (1.4)	-1.60 (1.4)	-5.94 (6.2)	0.14*	0.03
I will not want to deal with the perpetrator	3.88 (1.6)	0.22 (1.5)	0.66 (6.8)	0.33***	0.12
I will have support of my peers	5.27 (1.4)	2.18 (0.9)	11.83 (6.4)	0.41***	0.21**

p < .05*; p < .01**; p < .001***

(r=0.16; p < .05), and "victims or friends of victims of sexual harassment" (r=0.14; p < .05) were all significantly related to descriptive norms but had weaker effect sizes. "Friends of the perpetrator of sexual harassment" was not statically related to descriptive norms.

Finally, for PBC, the strongest barrier was "not having the support of my peers" (r=0.41; p < .001), followed by having an "unsafe situation" (r=0.37; p < .001) and "not wanting to deal with the perpetrator" (r=0.33; p < .001). "Not recognizing a situation as sexual harassment" was only found to be a small barrier to one's PBC, and "being intoxicated" was not found to be a significant barrier.

Discussion

Findings from this study reinforce the predictive utility of the Reasoned Action Approach and value-expectancy theory in understanding college students' intentions to intervene in potential sexual harassment situations. Specifically, students who reported more favorable attitudes toward intervention, stronger perceived normative support, and greater confidence in their ability to act were more likely to express intent to intervene. Furthermore, beliefs that intervention could produce positive outcomes (e.g., preventing harm, supporting victims) and valuing those outcomes significantly enhanced intention. These results underscore the importance of designing campus-based prevention programs that not only provide students with skills to intervene but also shape the underlying beliefs and motivations that drive behavior. For instance, highlighting positive social norms (e.g., "most students would step in"), reinforcing the value of protecting peers, and building confidence through practice scenarios can help bridge the gap between willingness and action.

Using a value expectancy framework, this study examined the degree to which attitudes, perceived norms, and PBC beliefs held by college students may contribute to the likelihood of them engaging in BI to prevent sexual harassment on college campuses. When examining commonalities among the three constructs based on the strength of association, results suggest that the perception from others (e.g., family members, friends, peers, and survivors of sexual harassment) and strong prosocial values (e.g., feeling proud to help others and educating others through example) have the most decisive influence on a student's decision to engage in BI. In other words, the RAA implies that if a bystander believes that engaging in a specific behavior will yield a benefit (either to themselves or others), they receive support from others to engage in the behavior, and if they believe in their abilities to act, then there is a high likelihood the individual will choose to engage in a BI (Ajzen, 1991; Montaño & Kasprzyk, 2015).

In this study, we elicited beliefs from individuals within the target population and evaluated the specific beliefs as they related to using BI to prevent sexual harassment. These beliefs were closely aligned with five major barriers/motivators Burn (2009) identified, which can be described as broad categories: failure to notice (e.g., not recognizing sexual harassment is happening, which can be difficult in some cases since it has a broader scope than sexual assault); failure to identify the situation as high risk (e.g., not recognizing sexual harassment as a dangerous situation); failure to take responsibility (e.g., not believing it is one's duty to act); not having the appropriate skills (e.g., not knowing how to engage in a BI); and social inhibition (e.g., not engaging in BI because it may be embarrassing or awkward). Similarly, research by McMahon (2015) found that undergraduate students had a greater likelihood to intervene in an instance of sexual assault when peers' perceptions

were supportive of their engagement.

Additionally, support from friends and family was consistent with findings noted by John et al. (2022). This approval, or lack thereof, especially from those who share a strong relationship, has been found to have a greater influence on predicting an individual's intentions than those who do not. Collectively, these constructs are seen to develop individuals' intrapersonal awareness and interpersonal relationships if they feel part of a collective community (Banyard et al., 2018). In terms of practice, implementing future BI that integrate positive prosocial behaviors and community engagement from the RAA constructs may encourage a higher prevalence of individuals holding positive intentions to engage in BI to stop sexual harassment on college campuses.

Attitudes surrounding the tolerance of sexual violence, sexual harassment, and other forms of nonconsensual sexual acts have been frequently linked to the justification of rape myth acceptance. These inaccurate beliefs about rape, survivors of rape, and the perpetrators shift blame from the offender to the survivors (Powers et al., 2015). Rectifying myths or misinformation pertaining to sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence, such as rape myths, may contribute to a reduction in unfavorable behavioral, normative, and control beliefs, thereby increasing the likelihood of adults to engage in BI. Labhardt et al. (2017) found that women with low rape myth acceptance and high confidence were more likely to intervene compared to others. Moreover, as confidence increased, the likelihood for women to intervene also increased. On the other hand, while men have a greater intent to intervene as bystanders compared to women, they also tend to have a higher rape myth acceptance. This may be explained by issues identifying with the survivors, as survivors of sexual violence or sexual harassment are often portrayed as female even when sexual violence and sexual harassment happen to both sexes alike (Labhardt et al., 2017).

Results further suggest that an unsafe environment, an inability to recognize a situation as sexual harassment, or audience inhibition—referring to being fearful of looking foolish in front of a crowd—are significant barriers preventing student engagement in BI (Mainwaring et al., 2023). Consistent with prior research, bystanders in the presence of others are more likely to intervene, as they feel less threatened by the risk of threat or physical retaliation from the perpetrator and have greater control over the situation (Mainwaring et al., 2023). Incorporating different intervention methods into BI programs that provide situation-dependent information increases the safety of both the bystander and the survivor. Having a varied approach to methodology within the BI programs further exposes the individual to different aspects of BI, which in turn increases participants' overall confidence in engaging in BI when necessary.

Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into current beliefs about engaging in BI to stop sexual harassment, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, one must consider the size of the sample. With fewer participants, the study's generalizability may be limited compared to a larger sample. Secondly, the data collected from participants attending university in the Western U.S. is not representative of all college students nationwide. Future research should look to mitigate these limitations, and in addition, widen the recruitment of participants from introductory level general education courses to a wider array of courses and departments across the university. Additionally, a lack of diversity within the sample due to a predominantly white (55%) sample further reduces the generalizability of the results. Finally, it was not evaluated

whether students had ever been a bystander, perpetrator, or survivor of sexual violence or harassment. Since this questionnaire was voluntary, it is possible that some individuals with such a past may avoid taking a questionnaire like this, since it could induce feelings of discomfort.

Despite limitations, the findings from this study suggest that the strength of the association between college students' beliefs and their likelihood of engaging in BI to stop sexual harassment on college campuses is greater when participants hold positive prosocial beliefs, receive support from others, and feel confident in their ability to control the situation. There is an imperative need to design a framework that emphasizes the importance of prosocial behavior, incorporating current attitudes, beliefs, and norms that exist among college students into the design of future BI programs. Although designing effective BI is complex, understanding college students' current motives and barriers for engaging in BI will help translate these insights into valuable BI programs to stop sexual violence and sexual harassment on college campuses.

Implications for Health Behavior Research

While research has been done to understand BI behaviors and intentions, this study uncovers value-expectancy based beliefs that are significantly related to BI intentions to stop sexual harassment, which is unique. If salient beliefs are known, universities can tailor BI programming to more effectively address sexual violence, including sexual harassment, within their communities. Future researchers can extend this work by studying more specific forms of sexual harassment (e.g., verbal, non-verbal, and physical forms), or specific BI strategies. For example, examining and comparing any differences in RAA-based salient beliefs based on what is known as the 5-Ds of

prevention (direct, distract, delegate, delay, document) (Coker et al., 2015; Right To Be, 2022) would be a positive next step to better understand how and why students engage in BI to stop sexual harassment. Health behavior researchers can also benefit from this study by learning to adopt the value expectancy approach in RAA and other theory-based research. Oftentimes, theoretical constructs are evaluated using broad-based questions that get at specific drivers of behaviors. By using the value expectancy approach, as in this study, researchers can utilize mixed methods approaches in research to better understand what influences specific health behaviors.

Discussion Questions

In this study, the Reasoned Action Approach was applied using a Bystander Intervention to prevent sexual harassment on college campuses. How can future studies evaluate the interaction between students' cognitions towards performing BI and environmental supports (or lack thereof) that promote a positive climate on campus?

Beyond the college setting, what other environments should BI be encouraged to prevent sexual violence (including sexual harassment)?

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