Journal of Gender-Based Violence • vol 1 • no 2 • 187–204 • © Centre for Gender and Violence Research, University of Bristol • #JGBV • Print ISSN 2398-6808 • Online ISSN 2398-6816
https://doi.org/10.1332/239868017X15048754886046

bystander research

Bystander intervention from the victims' perspective: experiences, impacts and justice needs of street harassment victims

Bianca Fileborn, b.fileborn@unsw.edu.au
University of New South Wales, Australia

This article examines street harassment victims' experiences of bystander intervention in incidents of harassment. Drawing on the findings of a mixed-methods pilot study undertaken in Melbourne, Australia, it considers what forms these interventions took and the impact(s) they had on the harassment. It examines the impact(s) that bystander intervention had on participants. Findings suggest that bystander intervention is not common in incidents of street harassment. When it does occur, its impact is highly variable. Yet, bystander intervention is also central in informing victims' perceptions of safety, harm and justice. These findings present some important implications and complexities for bystander research and education and these are considered in closing.

key words street harassment • bystander intervention • sexual violence • justice • harm

key messages

- Bystander intervention was not common in incidents of street harassment.
- Where bystander intervention does occur, the outcome is highly varied.
- Bystander intervention often reduced the perceived harm of an incident of street harassment, and can form an important component of street harassment victims' justice needs.

To cite this article: Fileborn, B. (2017) Bystander intervention from the victims' perspective: experiences, impacts and justice needs of street harassment victims, *Journal of Gender-Based Violence*, vol 1 no 2, 187–204, DOI: 10.1332/239868017X15048754886046

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Introduction

The role of bystander intervention in the prevention of sexual violence has received growing attention in feminist scholarship. While there has been much attention paid to the evaluation of bystander education and training programmes and to assessing the perceived likelihood of individuals to act as a bystander (Bennett et al, 2014; McMahon et al, 2014), there has been comparatively less attention given to the experiences of victims/survivors who have experienced bystander intervention, with the recent exceptions of Banyard et al (2016) and Hamby et al (2016). This raises questions regarding how effective victims perceive bystander intervention to be in practice and what importance bystander intervention holds for them. The experiences of victims

are likely to hold important insights into bystander intervention 'in action' (Banyard et al, 2016) and implications for education and the promotion of effective bystander behaviour. Additionally, to date there has been virtually no examination of bystander intervention in relation to the prevention of and responses to, street harassment.

Street harassment represents a highly prevalent form of sexual violence, with up to 90 per cent of women experiencing it in their lifetime (Johnson and Bennett, 2015; Lenton et al, 1999). Despite the harms caused by street harassment being well documented (Logan, 2015) many forms of street harassment are rarely responded to through formal legal avenues – though this is an evolving situation and does vary somewhat by jurisdiction. In the absence of formal legal response, it is perhaps even more vital that the 'wrongs' of street harassment are expressed through other, non-legal and symbolic means. Bystander intervention represents one such way of achieving this. In this respect, bystander intervention also holds potential as a type of informal justice response for those who have experienced street harassment.

In this article, I draw on the findings of a mixed-methods pilot project undertaken with street harassment victims in Melbourne, Australia. I consider street harassment victims' experiences of bystander intervention, explore the types of strategies that bystanders used in intervening and the effect of the intervention. It was also apparent that bystander intervention could play a central role in shaping participants' experiences of street harassment and I examine this in relation to perceptions of harm and safety and as a mechanism for achieving justice. In closing, I consider the implications of these findings for bystander education programmes and for broader efforts aiming to prevent street harassment.

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Street harassment

Street harassment constitutes a diffuse array of behaviours, with actions such as catcalling or unwanted verbal comments, leering/prolonged staring, groping, car-horn honking, flashing, kissing and wolf whistling commonly included within definitions (Logan, 2015). Others have also included sexual and physical assaults within the spectrum of street harassment (Logan, 2015). Such actions are perpetrated overwhelmingly by men and take place in public and semi-public spaces such as the street, licensed venues, shopping centres and so forth. Regardless of the scope of behaviours included, all forms of street harassment can be understood as interconnected and as situated within the continuum of men's violence against women (Fileborn, 2013; Kelly, 1988; Vera-Gray, 2016). Participants in this project discussed incidents of street harassment that spanned this continuum, as well as harassment based on diverse gender and sexuality, race, size and (dis)ability. Thus, while street harassment is often a form of sexualised violence, it is not exclusively so and the boundaries between sexual violence and homophobic, transphobic, racial and ableist abuse are not clear-cut.

Bystanders are individuals who witness, but are not directly involved in, an event and who have the opportunity to take steps to intervene in that event as it unfolds (Banyard, 2011; Cook and Reynald, 2016). Bystanders may do nothing, exacerbate the problematic behaviour, or take positive steps to help or assist those involved (Banyard, 2011; McMahon and Banyard, 2012). Moira Carmody defines an ethical bystander as someone 'whose behaviours intervene in ways that impact on "the event" and its outcomes positively. They take some action, but they are mindful of caring for themselves, as well as the impact on the other person' (Carmody, 2009, p

126). Following Carmody (2009), I adhere to the notion that bystander intervention must be 'ethical' and safe in nature and involve an element of self-care in conjunction with concern for the victim/potential victim, the centrality of which will become apparent later in the discussion.

Bystander intervention and sexual violence prevention

Bystander intervention has played an increasingly central role in sexual violence prevention. By arming potential bystanders with the skills to recognise and intervene in sexual violence or harassment as it is occurring, they may take steps to stop or prevent that violence from taking place (Amar et al, 2014; Burn, 2009; Coker et al, 2016). Such an approach shifts the responsibility for sexual violence prevention away from individual victims and onto the broader community (Banyard, 2011). While bystander intervention can involve direct intervention when an incident of sexual violence or harassment is occurring (see, for example, Hollaback, nd), it perhaps more commonly includes actions such as 'providing assistance to someone at risk of victimization, confronting a potential perpetrator, enlisting friends of a victims [sic] to intervene, saying something or calling in professional helpers like police' (Banyard, 2015, p 3). Bystander intervention programmes commonly focus on challenging the broader cultural norms that support and contribute towards sexual violence, such as sexist jokes and through disrupting violence-supportive myths and misconceptions (Banyard et al, 2004; McMahon et al, 2013).

Emerging evidence suggests that bystander training and intervention can contribute towards the prevention of sexual violence. Research to date demonstrates that bystander intervention programmes can shift participant attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence, as well as their propensity to act as a bystander (Lynch and Fleming, 2005; McMahon, 2015). Bystander training has been linked to reduced levels of sexual and other violence on US college campuses (Coker et al, 2016) and in other contexts (Cook and Reynald, 2016).

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Barriers to bystander intervention

Banyard (2015, p 62) warns that we should be wary of conceptualising bystander intervention in a linear manner, instead viewing bystander action 'as a process that may loop and coil over time to better account for the often-relational context of bystander action'. For Banyard (2015, p 68), the 'looping and coiling' components of the bystander process include: decision making, where the bystander must notice an incident and make the decision to intervene; complexity components, such as the severity of an incident, social and cultural norms, bystander identity and social location/access to power and past experiences of helping; contextual factors of the event itself, such as whether other bystanders are present, or whether the individuals involved are friends or strangers; and the outcomes of the intervention, including responses from the victim, perpetrator and onlookers, support received from others, whether the intervention escalated the incident and so forth. Barriers to intervention may occur at each of these stages and may interact with and co-inform one another in complex ways. Bystander behaviour is fluid and shifts across time and place and in response to experience and new knowledge.

The ability to identify that sexual violence or harassment is occurring is, of course, essential for bystander intervention to take place (Bennett et al, 2014; Bowes-Sperry and O'Leary-Kelly, 2005; Burn, 2009). Adherence to rape myths and misconceptions functions as a significant barrier to bystander intervention, with men more likely to adhere to these misplaced notions (Amar et al, 2014; Bannon et al, 2013; Cook and Reynald, 2016; McMahon, 2015). Diffusion of perceived responsibility is another well-documented barrier to bystander intervention: that is, it is unclear who has a responsibility to intervene in an incident, particularly when there are numerous bystanders (Banyard et al, 2004; Bennett et al, 2014; Bowes-Sperry and O'Leary-Kelly, 2005; Cook and Reynald, 2016).

Bystanders must also possess the requisite skills to be able to intervene effectively (Banyard et al, 2004; Burn, 2009; Casey and Ohler, 2012). Even if bystanders possess such skills, they may be reluctant to do so in certain contexts due to perceived embarrassment, risk of personal harm and other concerns regarding the breech of contextual social norms (Banyard et al, 2004; Bennett et al, 2014; Burn, 2009; Casey and Ohler, 2012; Cook and Reynald, 2016; McMahon, 2015). However, as Berkowitz (2005) argues, this concern for breeching social norms is often based on a 'false consensus', where bystanders (and particularly men) tend to overestimate the extent to which others support and condone violence supportive attitudes and behaviour.

The literature to date suggests that bystander intervention and education is a promising avenue for working towards the prevention of sexual violence. However, there has been virtually no attention paid to the role that bystander intervention plays in the prevention of street harassment. Resultantly, little is known about the types of strategies used in intervening, or the specific barriers that bystanders may encounter. Additionally, there is an absence of focus on victims' experiences of bystander intervention, with almost all research to date focusing on bystanders' self-reported efficacy and perceived likelihood to intervene in hypothetical or lab-based scenarios (Banyard et al, 2016; Hamby et al, 2016). Victims are likely able to provide unique insight into the effectiveness and importance of bystander intervention in real-life scenarios and it is vital that we examine their experiences (Banyard et al, 2016; Hamby et al, 2016). The present study aims to address these gaps by providing an initial exploration street of street harassment victims' experiences of bystander intervention.

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Methodology

The data discussed in this article stems from a mixed-methods pilot project on street harassment undertaken in Melbourne, Australia. This project sought to examine: street harassment victims' experiences and impacts of street harassment; disclosure and help-seeking practices; bystander intervention to street harassment; street harassment victims' justice needs and their preferred justice responses to street harassment. Ethics approval was received from La Trobe University Human Research Ethics Committee prior to initiating fieldwork.

An online survey was conducted via the platform *Qualtrics*. In order to take part, participants had to be aged 18 or older and have experienced street harassment (self-defined) in Melbourne. Participants were otherwise a self-selecting sample. Recruitment strategies included promotion of the survey through social networking sites and distribution through key local community organisations, which promoted

the survey through their own social media accounts or through e-newsletters. A total of 292 participants completed the survey. An overview of participants is provided in Table 1. No incentives were offered for participation in the survey.

The survey comprised a range of fixed and open-response questions examining participants' experiences of street harassment in Melbourne, the impacts of these experiences, perceptions of current and desired justice response to street harassment and demographic information. Of most relevance to this manuscript, participants were asked if anyone else had ever intervened when they were experiencing street harassment. This was followed by two open-text response questions asking participants to describe what that person did and what effect the intervention had, if any. Bystander intervention was also discussed by participants in response to a series of open-text response questions examining the factors that participants associated with more harmful or serious incidents of harassment, what they saw as being fundamental to a fair and just response to street harassment, what would need to happen for participants to feel that justice had been achieved in response to their own experiences of street harassment and how justice could be achieved in response to street harassment in general.

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Table 1: Survey participants' gender and sexual orientation

Gender	Number of participants	Sexual orientation	Number of participants
Cisgender woman	79.5% (n=232)	Lesbian	6.5% (n=19)
Cisgender man	7.5% (n=22)	Gay	3.4% (n=10)
Transgender woman	2.1% (n=6)	Bisexual	18.2% (n=53)
Genderqueer	3.1% (n=9)	Heterosexual	46.2% (n=135)
Genderfluid	2.4% (n=7)	Pansexual	8.6% (n=25)
Non-binary	2.1% (n=6)	Asexual	2.4% (n=7)
Other	3.4% (n=10)	Queer	10.6% (n=31)
		Other	4.1% (n=12)
Total	**N=292**	**Total**	**N=292**

The quantitative survey data were analysed using the software program SPSS. A descriptive analysis of the data was undertaken, with the analysis consisting of basic frequencies and cross tabulations. The cross tabulations were predominantly focused on examining any relationships between participants' gender and sexual orientation and their experiences of bystander intervention.

Qualitative survey data were analysed thematically. An initial reading of the qualitative data was undertaken in order to identify emergent themes. A second reading of the data followed, with exemplary quotes sorted into Excel spreadsheets. The question themes were used as higher-level codes (for example, 'experiences of street harassment', 'impacts of street harassment', 'understandings of justice'), with the data further sorted into sub-codes based on the repeated thematic patterns identified in participants' responses. Particular care was taken to identify the complexity, contradictions and divergences in participants' responses. Following Law (2004), attention was paid to the 'messiness' of the social world. I also sought to examine

any apparent differences or similarities in responses according to gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity and disability.

Results

What were participants' experiences of bystander intervention and what impacts did such intervention have on both the perpetrators' actions and participants' experiences of the harassment? I move on now to consider these findings. The following discussion focuses on forms of bystander intervention reported by participants that occurred while harassment was occurring, or in the immediate aftermath of the harassment – support provided at a later point, such as following a disclosure, is not considered here. As this study was concerned with examining participants' experiences of bystander intervention, it can only consider forms of intervention that were observed by participants.

No bystander intervention

Participants were asked if anyone had ever intervened when they were experiencing street harassment. The majority (59.9 per cent, n=175) indicated that they had never experienced bystander intervention. A large minority (27.4 per cent, n=80) reported that someone had intervened when they were experiencing street harassment. There were no differences according to participant gender or sexual orientation: a minority of all demographic groups reported experiencing bystander intervention. This suggests that bystander intervention was not a common occurrence in incidents of street harassment, at least for those who took part in this study.

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Bystander intervention in action

For the 80 participants who had encountered bystander intervention, what forms did this action take? It is worth noting here that even for those participants who had experienced intervention, this was not a common or 'usual' experience. As one person commented, 'most people just sit around looking awkward waiting for it to end' (38, transgender woman, asexual).

McMahon and colleagues (2013) describe bystander intervention as falling into two overarching categories: direct, where the bystander interacts directly with the victim or perpetrator; and, indirect, where the bystander interacts with other bystanders. Within these two categories, bystander action may involve delegation to someone else, creating a distraction or diversion, or directly interacting with the perpetrator or victim. Additionally, the form of communication with the victim or bystander may be passive, assertive or aggressive. These categories of intervention largely reflect those described by participants in this study.

Verbal intervention

Verbal intervention was by far the most common form of bystander intervention discussed by participants (n=53). Typically, this included direct verbal intervention targeted towards the perpetrator of street harassment. Often, friends of the victim or strangers who had observed the harassment made this type of intervention, however

some participants reported friends of the perpetrator intervening. This type of verbal intervention is encapsulated in the following comments:

> One man told his mates to leave me alone. (26, cisgender woman, queer)

> My friends have stuck up for me…and said things like 'Leave her alone!' Once one of my male friends threatened to fight the guy who was harassing me (but luckily the guy backed down). (30, cisgender woman, queer)

While verbal intervention was typically described as being 'assertive' in nature, the comments from the second participant highlight that it could at times be aggressive in nature. Another participant described the use of humorous verbal interjections:

> My sister is very quick witted and would often use her wit to disarm/stun the aggressor into silence/confusion…I was being loudly asked if my (quite large) breasts were real, she responded immediately with 'No, she's a man' which stopped them in their tracks. (26, cisgender woman, bisexual)

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Ejecting perpetrator

For street harassment that occurred in semi-public spaces such as licensed venues, public transport or shopping centres, a small number of participants (n=5) reported that bystanders intervened by removing the perpetrator from the premises or by denying them entry. This could be considered a direct, active form of intervention. For example, one woman (31, cisgender, heterosexual) said that a 'tram driver kicked a guy off the tram for harassing me', while another (20, cisgender woman, queer) reported a shopkeeper denying entry to her perpetrator after she sought refuge in his store. However, other participants reported incidents where staff or security guards refused to take action against perpetrators, or ignored incidents of harassment.

Making space

A minority of participants (n=14) described bystanders intervening by creating physical space between the perpetrator and victim, in an active form of intervention. This type of intervention could be either direct or indirect, depending upon the context. For example, one participant described an incident where she was out with her brother and his friendship group when a man 'started bothering' her. In response, her brother and his friends 'formed a human wall and told him he wasn't going to talk to me anymore' (30, cisgender woman, asexual). By combining this strategy with direct verbal comments to the perpetrator, this intervention incorporates elements of direct and indirect intervention. Another participant had bystanders intervene by putting 'their own body in between my space and the harassers' space' (32, cisgender woman, queer), suggesting a more indirect (yet active) form of intervention.

Checking in

Participants (n=6) occasionally identified having a bystander 'check in' with them as a form of intervention. This 'checking in' could take various forms, though it typically

involved having a bystander directly ask them if they were 'okay', as the following comment illustrates:

> When I was moving around or near queer spaces, queers would often check in or offer support if they witnessed a negative or suspect interaction with a cis-man. (27, cisgender woman, genderqueer/fluid, queer)

Others described more passive forms of intervention, such as having a bystander (usually described as a woman) smile kindly or sympathetically at them. One participant discussed having women 'tell me to sit near them sometimes. Not often' (27, transgender woman, lesbian), illustrating how 'checking in' may also co-occur with other forms of intervention, such as creating space.

Contacting police

Less commonly, participants (n=6) discussed bystanders contacting, or threatening to contact, the police as a form of intervention. Notably, for one participant (47, cisgender man, gay) this occurred during an incident where a man (who the participant described as suffering from a mental illness) was verbally abusing and spitting at members of the public and damaged a nearby car. It was less clear that this type of intervention occurred for sexualised harassment.

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Male partners

A number of participants (n=12) indicated that their male partner or friends acted as a deterrent to perpetrators:

> If my partner is male he often just has to show up and be there. If it's a female friend helping then they tend to have to show up in numbers, or clearly [be] physically strong. (42, cisgender woman, queer)

This type of passive 'intervention' highlights the gendered nature of bystander intervention and its effects: it reaffirms the notion that women accompanied by men in public spaces are 'off limits', while those unaccompanied are open to approach. While in the experience of this participant having her partner 'show up' appears to have been a relatively effective form of intervention, it is vital that bystander tactics do not work to perpetuate the gendered norms and power structures that underlie sexual violence. That said, some participants reported experiencing street harassment even if their male partner was present, suggesting that even problematic notions of women as male property are insufficient to deter harassers in some instances.

Physical presence

A small number of participants (n=5) described bystanders who supported them by being physically present. For example, for two participants this involved bystanders walking with them to a safe location in the aftermath of an incident. Another participant described being harassed by a drug-affected individual at a train station. In order to support her:

> A guy in a suit with a briefcase came up, saw us and took out one of his headphones and stood nearly. He kept making eye contact with me, letting me know that he was paying attention if I wanted him to step in…Business guy watched to make sure stoner guy didn't get onto the same carriage as me. (24, cisgender woman, pansexual)

Impacts of bystander intervention

For those participants who had experienced bystander intervention, what effect did it have? Participants' responses highlighted that bystander intervention could have a diverse array of perceived effects, ranging from virtually no impact, to ending the harassment, to escalating the harassment. There were not necessarily clear links or patterns between the type of intervention and its effect. This lack of clarity was well encapsulated in the comments from the survey participant quoted earlier, whose sister was adept at intervening harassment in a sharp, humorous manner. Yet, this participant commented that the effects of this intervention varied from:

> Turning the situation on its head and shutting the perpetrator up/scaring them off. Occasionally it has just encouraged more aggressive behaviour. Often it has had no effect. (26, cisgender woman, bisexual)

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This type of experience was not uncommon among participants, suggesting that further work is required to refine our understanding of the contextual factors that shape the outcomes of bystander intervention. Likewise, the outcome of an intervention could be fluid. For instance, participants occasionally described interventions that initially escalated the harassment, but eventually led to the harassment ceasing. Thus, the following outcomes should not be considered mutually exclusive.

Defusing or stopping harassment

For a majority of participants (n=47), bystander intervention was effective at diffusing or ending an incident of street harassment at least some of the time. One participant recounted an experience of street harassment that ceased after the perpetrators' friend intervened. After this:

> His mates left me alone and I felt better knowing that sometimes men are capable of setting a better example to their friends. (26, cisgender woman, queer)

This participant's experience highlights the potential power of male peer-group intervention. Having one's peers intervene clearly communicates that perpetrating street harassment contravenes peer group norms and in this instance, was a powerful dissuading force. The power of social norms was also apparent in the comment of another participant, who reported that bystander intervention was usually effective at ending harassment in the following circumstances:

> If you outnumber the harasser or can create a sense of community condemnation they're more likely to leave you alone. It also feels a lot better

> to respond and call them out, as opposed to shrinking away and feeling abused. Harassers seldom apologise though. (32, cisgender woman, heterosexual)

There may be power in numbers when it comes to intervening in street harassment. Here, this participant appears to refer to the advantage provided by physically outnumbering the perpetrator (for instance, that it is futile to challenge a large group), but also to the importance of community in clearly signalling social disapproval of the behaviour. Yet, as highlighted earlier, bystanders often failed to intervene in incidents of street harassment and this type of group response may not be a common occurrence. This participant's comments also begin to draw attention to the potential significance of bystander intervention and the power of 'shouting back' at harassers, which for this participant enabled her to 'feel better' and regain a sense of autonomy – and I return to this point below.

Several participants reiterated the role of gender in shaping successful bystander intervention. For instance, while one survey participant said that while 'usually the person harassing me backs off…it's always a male who seems to drive them off easily. Women have come to my defence a few times, but they have to really scream and make a fuss' (29, cisgender woman, bisexual). Likewise, another participant commented 'when male friends intervene I find I am usually left alone after that' (25, cisgender woman, heterosexual).

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Escalating harassment

In contrast to instances where bystander intervention functioned to diffuse or end harassment, some participants (n=13) described experiences where intervention further inflamed and escalated the situation. The notion that male bystanders were, at least at times, more effective was challenged by another set of comments highlighting the potential for this to escalate the seriousness of the harassment. For example, one female participant (26, cisgender woman, heterosexual) said that perpetrators often become more aggressive when her male partner has told them to leave her alone. Another recalled an experience where a bystander had told a man to 'calm down' after he had acted in an intimidating and physically aggressive manner towards herself and other passengers on a train. In this instance, this intervention resulted in 'more abuse from [the] perp[etrator]'.

Displacement of harassment to bystander

Another outcome of bystander intervention was the displacement of the harassment to the bystander (n=14) – often coupled with an escalation of the abuse. After one participant's male friend intervened in an incident of street harassment 'the man punched my friend in the face' (27, cisgender woman, bisexual). Other participants shared similar experiences where bystanders were physically assaulted as a result of intervening, although the gender of the bystanders was not always identified. Experiences such as these suggest that masculinity plays a multi-faceted role in mediating the outcome of bystander intervention. It is likely that particular iterations of masculine performance are shaping the responses of the perpetrator and bystander (and these are likely to be fluid and context dependent). Thus, bystander intervention from other men may be read as a form of social disapproval and exclusion, suggesting

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that one's performance of masculinity is inappropriate within that particular context. Yet, in other contexts, such intervention appears to be read as a challenge or contest: as an opportunity to engage in hegemonic, masculine displays of aggression and violence. What is unclear from these participants' accounts is why these different outcomes occur and there is a clear need here to further investigate the contextual factors shaping these outcomes.

No impact

For other participants (n=12), bystander intervention had no apparent impact on the perpetrator's behaviour in the moment – although the context of the harassment and the type of intervention was not always clear in participants' accounts. One participant recounted an experience where a bystander had pretended to be her boyfriend in an attempt to ward off her harassers. However, this participant said the impact of this was 'not much. Perpetrators were persistent, just less aggressive' (31, cisgender woman, queer). Another participant commented that bystander intervention 'rarely helps at all' (19, cisgender woman, bisexual). It is important to note, however, that this apparent lack of impact is based upon participants' *perceptions*: whether the perpetrators of (or other witnesses to) the harassment were in fact affected by the intervention remains unknown.

The importance of bystander intervention to victims

While the discussion thus far has examined the types of bystander intervention that participants typically experienced and the impacts this intervention had, I move on to examine the significance of bystander intervention to participants. It was clear from participants' accounts that bystander intervention could play a central role in mediating their experiences of street harassment and in shaping a sense of justice.

Feeling safe and supported

Bystander intervention could be vital in helping participants (n=18) feel safe and supported. After a woman told her perpetrator off and 'walked with me until I was safe', one participant said that she 'felt not only safe but that humanity was largely OK because people would stand up for each other' (34, cisgender woman, bisexual). Likewise, another participant said that for her bystander intervention:

> Made all the difference knowing that there was someone in the world who would believe me and…cared enough to intervene if necessary. (24, cisgender woman, pansexual)

This suggests that bystander intervention has an important role to play not only in preventing or stopping the behaviour of perpetrators and in shifting the norms that support sexual violence, but also in supporting the wellbeing and sense of safety experienced by victims. That said, the extent to which victims felt supported could depend on when bystander intervention occurred. For instance, one participant commented that although having bystanders ask if she was 'okay' after harassment had occurred made her feel validated:

> While you are going through the incident you still feel quite alone. If people don't have any reaction while someone is essentially violating your space then they…send the message that what that person is doing is acceptable on some level. (28, cisgender woman, heterosexual)

In some instances, bystander intervention could negatively affect the safety of participants. One participant shared an experience where a male bystander had intervened when another man was acting in an aggressive manner towards her after she had left a nightclub in the early hours of the morning. After intervening, the male bystander insisted on walking her to her bike. However, the participant was wary of this bystander as he 'was looking at me in a way that also made me uncomfortable' and refused to leave her alone after repeated reassurances that she was okay. After this bystander intervened, she:

> Felt worse. I believe that [bystander] would have walked me to my bike and then expected 'something' for 'saving' me…I don't believe his intentions were actually good, he was more like the hyena, I was the zebra and the [initial perpetrator] was the lion. (28, cis-gender woman, bisexual)

This suggests that some predatory men may be able to use bystander intervention as a tool to facilitate access to women.

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Perceptions of harm

Bystander intervention was raised by participants (n=18) in response to a question regarding what factors they associate with more harmful forms of street harassment. The failure of potential bystanders to intervene was often identified as exacerbating harm. As one participant commented, 'being surrounded by other people and not being helped' (22, cisgender woman, bisexual) was associated with more harmful experiences for her. Another participant indicated that street harassment 'feels more humiliating' (23, cisgender woman, heterosexual) when witnesses fail to intervene. One individual evocatively described a lack of intervention as generating a 'feeling of isolation and fear'. She described herself as 'constantly wondering how far this might escalate…knowing that the likelihood is that no-one will intervene (44, cisgender woman, heterosexual). However, it was often unclear what form(s) of intervention or support these participants desired and this warrants further exploration. In contrast, a minority of participants reported feeling embarrassed by bystander intervention. One participant commented that for him 'the more people that notice it the more horrible it is' (29, cisgender man, gay). Thus, while bystander intervention was typically viewed as important to participants and as reducing the perceived harm of harassment, this was not universally the case.

A sense of justice

Finally, bystander intervention influenced the extent to which participants felt a sense of justice was (or could be) achieved, suggesting that bystander intervention constitutes an important component of street harassment victims' justice needs (Clark, 2010).

While participants identified a broad range of factors that were integral to achieving justice, bystander intervention was commonly raised as one facet of this.

The potential for bystander intervention to denounce the actions of perpetrators and, to some extent, hold them to account for their behaviour was strongly valued by many participants (n=42). This sentiment was encapsulated in the following comments:

> I would feel justice had been achieved if, when men catcalled me in the street, every other person around who heard and saw it, together turned on the men and denounced their behaviour. (51, cisgender woman, heterosexual)

The potential for intervention to cause a sense of shame or embarrassment to perpetrators was also raised, with some participants expressing that this would, in some respects, help to hold perpetrators to account and ensure that they experience some form of consequence for their actions. For one participant, this involved having bystanders confront the perpetrator and engage in a dialogue expressing:

> That 1) the behaviour is not OK, 2) the person is responsible for their behaviour, 3) the person becomes ashamed of their behaviour, 4) the person commits to changing their behaviour. (35, non-binary, bisexual)

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However, it is questionable whether this type of approach would be a fruitful one for generating behavioural and attitudinal change. This participant assumes that both the bystander and perpetrator are willing to engage in a productive and respectful dialogue, while the potential for such an exchange to become hostile or to be met with resistance from the perpetrator remains unacknowledged.

A number of participants believed that 'men stopping other men and shaming them for their behaviour' (26, cisgender woman, queer) would be a particularly effective and meaningful form of intervention – although as the earlier discussion illustrated, the gendered dynamics of bystander intervention are far more complicated than this in practice. Participants believed that bystander intervention would help in creating a culture in which street harassment became a social taboo, thus contributing towards the ultimate form of justice: the prevention and elimination of street harassment.

Bystander intervention could also function to validate and affirm the harmful nature of street harassment. Given that street harassment is often dismissed as a minor or trivial occurrence – if not a compliment – having others communicate that it is inappropriate behaviour was highly valued by some participants. As the following survey participant said, for her justice would be achieved if:

> Another person intervened and said, 'Hey, that's not appropriate, what are you doing?'…It would feel more validated coming from a third party. (23, cisgender woman, heterosexual)

Discussion

This article set out to examine the extent and nature of street harassment victims' experiences of bystander intervention. Findings from this research indicate that bystander intervention was relatively uncommon in response to street harassment,

with most participants having never directly experienced or observed it. However, this study can only account for forms of bystander intervention that were visible to participants, or that involved them directly. Given that bystander intervention may consist of a broad array of tactics, many of which do not involve confrontational behaviour or engaging directly with the victim or perpetrator, participants' experiences can necessarily only provide limited insights into bystander intervention 'in action'. For those who had such experiences, interventions took a variety of forms, though verbal intervention was the most common. It should be noted that the effectiveness of the interventions identified was highly varied. While the majority of participants reported that bystander intervention had a positive outcome it at times exacerbated the harassment, or appeared to do little to alleviate the harassment in the moment, according to participants' perceptions. These findings are largely consistent with Hamby et al (2016), who found that bystander intervention was more likely to help rather than harm the situation and more commonly had no apparent impact. Bystander intervention could, at times, exacerbate harms to both the victim and the bystander in Hamby et al's study and I return to the importance of this later. Despite the varied perceived effectiveness of bystander intervention in the current research, it played an often-significant role in shaping the nature of participants' experiences. Bystander intervention was generally (though not always) associated with feeling safe and with decreased harm. This is again consistent with Hamby et al (2016), whose participants reported lower levels of fear when bystanders were present for some forms of victimisation.

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Notably, bystander intervention formed an important component of many participants' understandings of how 'justice' could be achieved in relation to street harassment. Indeed, participants' experiences suggest that bystander intervention could be conceptualised as an informal justice mechanism and harm reduction strategy, as well as a preventative effort. Together, such findings extend current research by examining bystander prevention from victims' perspectives.

At the same time, the current findings present some challenges, highlight barriers to intervention and point to areas where further research is required. As most participants had never experienced direct bystander intervention, this raises questions regarding the extent to which bystanders recognise street harassment as a form of sexual violence that requires intervention. The experiences of participants in this research suggest that bystander recognition is likely to be low. Given current research on barriers to bystander intervention and the nature and context of street harassment, this is in many respects unsurprising. For instance, street harassment is often dismissed as a trivial occurrence, or excused as a 'joke' or good-natured 'banter'. This may mean that onlookers are less likely to recognise street harassment as 'harmful', particularly for those who are higher in rape myth acceptance and more likely to label only the most severe forms of sexual violence as such (see Banyard, 2011). The nature and context of at least some street harassment means that it is likely to appear highly ambiguous in nature. It may, for example, be difficult to determine if a conversation or romantic advance between strangers is unwanted, or, indeed, if the parties involved are in fact strangers to one another. As Bowes-Sperry and O'Leary-Kelly (2005) have observed of sexual harassment in the workplace, the ambiguity and lack of shared definitions of what constitutes sexual harassment make it challenging for bystanders to confidently identify harassment and intervene (see also Banyard, 2015; Banyard et al, 2004; Burn, 2009; Cook and Reynald, 2016). Madan and Nalla's (2016) Indian-

based research on public sexual harassment found that men were less likely to view different forms of harassment as 'serious' in comparison to women. Similar barriers are likely to operate for potential bystanders to street harassment.

The extent to which potential bystanders are able to recognise street harassment when it is occurring and feel confident in safely intervening, moreover, is unclear and warrants further research. Diffusion of responsibility is also likely to be particularly high given the public setting of street harassment, so it is vital that potential bystanders be imbued with a sense of responsibility and clear strategies to intervene. In this respect, bystander education programmes would benefit from explicitly addressing street harassment. This also suggests that our educational efforts must extend beyond college settings to include the broader public. It should also be noted that the outcomes of bystander intervention reported by participants were not always positive. Indeed, it could escalate harassment or displace harm onto the bystander. These outcomes raise serious questions regarding the ethics and safety of bystander intervention and draw attention to the importance of Carmody's (2009) concept of the 'ethical bystander'. It is vital that bystanders are trained to be mindful of self-care and be armed with strategies that minimise the potential for escalation or displacement. The findings presented here tend to support the notion that directly confronting a perpetrator is unlikely to represent a safe form of intervention, particularly if the bystander does not know the perpetrator. Hamby et al (2016) further note that incidents where bystanders are harmed are associated with more negative outcomes for the victim (for example, increased fear). While this was not explicitly addressed in the present study, this relationship warrants further examination and it is certainly plausible that similar outcomes would occur when bystanders are harmed when intervening in street harassment. Further work is needed to identify the contextual factors shaping the likelihood of an escalation of harassment or displacement of harm onto the bystander. There is a lack of clarity regarding which bystander interventions are effective in which contexts (Banyard, 2015) and how factors such as the type of harassment, location, perpetrator characteristics, strength of social and community connections (Banyard et al, 2016; Hamby et al, 2016) and so forth might shape the outcomes of intervention and future bystander behaviour. Refining our understanding of the outcomes of different interventions may assist in guiding bystanders in intervening in an 'ethical', safe and effective manner (Banyard, 2015; Hamby et al, 2016).

Yet, this is further complicated by the fact that many participants greatly valued bystander intervention as an informal justice mechanism, particularly where the perpetrator was directly confronted and denounced – an intervention where escalation or displacement of harm appeared particularly likely to occur. That said, at other times participants did not clearly articulate the form of bystander intervention that they desired and it may well be the case that a sense of justice can also be achieved through less confrontational and direct forms of intervention – again, this is a point that warrants further investigation. There is a clear tension here between some participants' expressed justice needs and the safety and wellbeing of bystanders. Additionally, it is questionable to what extent this form of direct, confrontational intervention is an *effective* one, particularly given it may be met with a defensive response from the perpetrator. Individual victim needs may in this instance be counter to broader social justice aims (see also Fileborn and Vera-Gray, 2017). For instance, what are the broader impacts if a bystander is harmed? Might this, for example, discourage future bystander intervention or have other follow-on effects (Banyard, 2015: 70)? In the longer term, it

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may be more fruitful to address the underlying social and cultural norms that facilitate street harassment and prevent various forms of bystander intervention (Berkowitz, 2005), rather than encouraging direct confrontation, which while potentially satisfying to the individual victim in the moment, may ultimately be counterproductive. It is also quite possible that participants' desire for bystanders to confront perpetrators would shift with the knowledge that it may be counterproductive to longer-term goals to shift the social and cultural norms that support street harassment, or harmful to the bystander: this particular justice need was expressed on the assumption that direct confrontation was an *effective* form of intervention.

Given that bystander intervention was associated with positive outcomes for some participants, such as reducing the perceived harm of the incident (and see Hamby et al, 2016), it is important that helpful bystander actions be identified and communicated to potential bystanders. However, to complicate matters somewhat, not all participants experienced bystander intervention as positive. Bystanders must be mindful that intervention is not always what victims 'want' (although, there is a delicate ethical balance here between preventing sexual harm weighted against the potential for that intervention to be unwanted or embarrassing) and bystanders must be attuned to the impact their action is having on the victim – as one participant said, 'listen to women' (28, cisgender woman, bisexual).

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Limitations

Participants in this project were a self-selecting convenience sample from a large city. Many participants were highly educated, or in the process of studying for a higher degree and the majority were from an Anglo-Saxon cultural background. As such the findings are not generalisable or transferable. The findings discussed were collected through a mixed-methods online survey. Participants did not always provide rich contextual detail of their experiences and it was of course not possible to ask participants further questions about their experiences. As a result, the contextual factors that contributed towards effective or ineffective bystander intervention were not always apparent and further research is required to develop insight into this.

Conclusion

This research provides unique insights into bystander intervention in incidents of street harassment from victims' perspectives and provides insight into how bystander intervention can function in 'real life' situations. While the research highlights areas of possible contradiction and ambiguity, it also draws attention to the potential significance of bystander intervention beyond a tool for prevention, as well as providing insight into areas where bystander education and research may work towards identifying and developing more effective intervention strategies such that we may work towards best supporting street harassment victims and, ultimately, eliminating this form of sexual violence.

Acknowledgements
Funding from the La Trobe University Transforming Human Societies Research Focus Area supported this research.

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