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Bystander actions in gendered violence in public and private spaces

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OUT OF THE SHADOWS

BYSTANDER ACTIONS IN GENDERED VIOLENCE IN
PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPACES

CARLIJN VAN BAAK

Out of the Shadows

Bystander Actions in Gendered Violence in Public and Private Spaces

Carlijn van Baak

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Voor Jo & Goos

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Out of the Shadows

Bystander Actions in Gendered Violence in Public and Private Spaces

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Summary

This dissertation focuses on the role of gender in bystander behavior in violent situations in both public and private spaces. Using CCTV footage from the Municipality of Amsterdam, I examine bystander behavior during conflicts in public space. In addition, I investigate bystander behavior in instances of intimate partner violence (IPV) – often occurring in “private” spaces – using case files of reports made to *Safe at Home* [Veilig Thuis] (the national domestic violence hotline).

Using both qualitative and quantitative research methods, this is investigated in four distinct chapters. In Chapter 2, I analyze the actions of bystanders during conflicts in public space – not only *how* they intervene, but also what they do *beyond* intervention. Additionally, I examine to what extent men and women vary or overlap in the enactment of these various actions. In Chapter 3, I investigate whether bystander intervention is associated with the gender composition of the conflict parties. In other words, is bystander intervention more likely in conflicts between men or between men and women? I also explore the role of intimacy: does it matter if the conflict involves individuals who—based on observations—seem to maintain intimate ties? In Chapter 4, I examine bystanders’ reasons to report their suspicions of intimate partner violence to *Safe at Home*, considering both the bystander’s gender and the gender composition of the partners. Finally, in Chapter 5, I investigate the reasons bystanders choose to report *anonymously* to *Safe at Home* as a specific form of intervention.

The results of the study show that bystander behavior during violent situations in both public and private spaces is incredibly diverse. There are some nuances in the behavior of men and women—aligning with gender expectations that individuals enact in their helping behavior—in both *how* and *where* they intervene. At the same time, these differences are smaller than expected based on previous literature, and it appears that bystanders often intervene, regardless of the gender composition of the individuals. To better understand bystander behavior, including the gendered nuances, it is important to look beyond physical intervention and to consider various forms of intervention, as well as to examine bystander behavior in different contexts.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Introduction

It was the early morning of March 13, 1964, New York City. The 28-year-old Kitty Genovese had just finished her work shift, parked her car, and walked towards her apartment complex. When she almost arrived, a man suddenly ran after her with a knife, and stabbed her twice in the back. The man, later identified as Winston Moseley, ran away when he heard someone scream at him, and Kitty Genovese, who was severely injured, managed to escape and tried to make it to the entrance of her apartment complex. Shortly after, Winston Moseley returned, and found Kitty Genovese injured and barely conscious in the hallway of the building, where he stabbed her several more times before raping her. Sadly, Kitty Genovese died in the ambulance on her way to the hospital.

Two weeks later, the case sparked public outrage when the New York Times headlined “37 Who Saw Murder Didn’t Call the Police. Apathy at Stabbing of Queens Woman Shocks Inspector” (Gansberg, 1964). According to the article, 38 bystanders had witnessed the stalking and stabbing of Kitty Genovese, and while the sound of their voices had allegedly frightened Winston Moseley off, he was able to return to stab her again because not one person called the police during the assault (Gansberg, 1964). The only phone call that had been made was reportedly not until after Kitty Genovese had died.

In 2007, Manning and colleagues, relying on archival material, found no evidence for the story of 38 inactive bystanders during the murder of Kitty Genovese. They found that not all bystanders were eye witnesses, several bystanders claimed the police were called immediately, and Kitty Genovese was, in fact, still alive when the police arrived (Manning et al., 2007). In addition, none of the bystanders could have seen Kitty Genovese or Winston Moseley the entire attack, and none of them saw the stabbing. In particular the second attack, which occurred inside the building, could not have been visible to many bystanders (Manning et al., 2007). Somewhat ironically, and rarely mentioned in the framing of the story, Winston Moseley was able to be captured a few days later *because* of the intervention of urban bystanders (Kassin, 2017).

When I first learned about the Kitty Genovese case during my studies, I was equally appalled. As a young woman, the perceived dangers of public space had long been ingrained – avoiding solitary walks or bike rides late at night, steering clear of unfamiliar faces, and staying vigilant of one’s surroundings – and this murder represented the most severe form of danger as a woman in public space. Like many others, I was initially under the assumption that no one had intervened in the murder of Kitty Genovese, and that this was not an exception but rather the standard. A few

years later, I watched the documentary ‘The Witness’, documenting Bill Genovese’s experiences during his year-long reexamination of his sister’s murder and its media portrayal, which represented a double tragedy: in addition to coping with the brutal murder on his sister, Bill Genovese had lived for decades with the inaccurate portrayal that passive bystanders could have prevented this murder. The impact of this became painfully clear: determined to never be a passive bystander himself, Bill joined the military, where he lost both legs during the Vietnam War. When Bill Genovese discovered that the media portrayal of Kitty’s murder had been inaccurate, and that the murder most likely could not have been prevented by the present bystanders, he could ultimately find some form of closure fifty years after the tragic loss of his beloved sister.

Whereas this perhaps symbolized the end of a long journey for Bill Genovese, it formed the beginning of my own. The case of Kitty Genovese had always intrigued me, which was perhaps fueled by my strong sense of justice (with my parents reminding me from a young age not to carry the weight of the world on my shoulders). My curiosity within criminology had, from the very start, gravitated towards understanding and combating violence against women, and the case of Kitty Genovese represented a stark reminder of the importance thereof. Upon discovering that the case itself had been far more nuanced than what I, along with many others, had been taught, I found the persistent yet false narrative of bystander apathy a form of injustice. After all, for decades, individuals have understood bystander behavior as passive, which has shaped their – and, in particular, women’s – perceptions of public safety and their navigation within these spaces. This may not only limit our scientific understanding of bystanders’ *active* responses to real-life emergencies, but also our ability to utilize the full potential of ordinary citizens in prevention and intervention efforts. The complexities of the Kitty Genovese case, as such, also highlighted the need to challenge misconceptions that hinder our understanding of bystander behavior and ultimately impact public safety.

As argued by Manning and colleagues (2007), the story of Kitty Genovese is much more than the – inaccurate – story of 38 passive witnesses. Importantly, the story of Kitty Genovese is also a story of gender and violence (Cherry, 1995). While Winston Moseley confessed that he “just set out to find any girl that was unattended and [he] was going to kill her” (Brownmiller, 1975, p. 199) – the pinnacle of “stranger danger” – the fact that this was an attack by a *man* against a *woman* in which bystanders were reportedly reluctant to intervene appeared to spark little outrage (Cherry, 1995). The numerous experiments on bystander behavior in emergency situations that followed focused on more general – and sometimes trivial – artificially staged situations,

such as reporting a room filled with smoke (Latané & Darley, 1968), hearing someone having an epileptic seizure (Darley & Latané, 1968) or a choking fit (Gottlieb & Carver, 1980), hearing someone fall (Latané & Rodin, 1969), or someone dropping a pencil (Latané & Dabbs, 1975). As such, the “link to the Kitty Genovese incident was stripped of its original gendered particulars, that is an *attack* on a woman was no longer an essential component in the laboratory exploration of what the event meant” (Cherry, 1995, p. 21). Yet, if the case of Kitty Genovese sparked the field of research on bystander behavior, and subsequent studies have often overlooked these gendered particulars, what do we actually *know* about bystander behavior in situations involving *gendered* violence? Since Cherry’s (1995) work almost three decades ago, a substantial body of literature on bystander behavior and gendered violence has emerged. Yet, what knowledge do we have about bystander behavior in gendered violence beyond the hypothetical reports that are typically used – about bystander behavior in *real-life* situations?

With the initial attack occurring in a residential street in Queens, New York City, the story of Kitty Genovese is also a story of public space. This not only embodies a social setting where individuals engage in self-presentation and interact with an audience to convey certain impressions to others in a public realm (Goffman, 1959), but also one where interactions cannot be fully understood without consideration of gender (Bondi & Rose, 2003; Gardner, 1989). While the gendered particulars of the Kitty Genovese case were relatively absent from the body of research that followed, the opposite happened in the media portrayal of the case of Kitty Genovese, which provided a clear example of how media portrayal can elevate perceived risks of victimization in public spaces (Lee, 2007; Lurigio, 2015). As argued by Hengehold (2011), “millions of young women have read this story about the radical abandonment of a raped woman as if it were not just a journalistic report, but a truth about the “normal” human behavior that educated women should expect their fellow citizens to demonstrate if they find themselves in a situation similar to Genovese’s” (p. 57). This represents an interesting paradox, as cases such as the rape and murder of Kitty Genovese are relatively rare, and women are at greater risk for physical violence in domestic rather than public spaces (Bondi & Rose, 2003; Gardner, 1995; Mooney, 2018; Rader, 2023).¹ Yet, the portrayal of this case reinforced the notion that women

1. While victimization surveys show that men are more likely to be victims of physical violence in public space, it is important to note that harassment is rarely included in such studies. As some scholars (e.g., Condon et al., 2007; Stanko, 1990) have argued, the “paradox” of higher rates of women’s fear of crime despite lower risk of victimization is potentially not as paradoxical if verbal harassment were accounted for, as women’s regular exposure to forms of harassment in public space may – despite not being an extreme form of (physical) violence – nevertheless signal to women that they are not in their rightful place and therefore affect their mobility (Condon et al., 2007; Stanko, 1990).

are vulnerable to harm when they navigate public space independently – a space historically constructed as a realm for men where women were restricted to be alone (Kern, 2020) –, fostering the perception that women's safety, and their prime action sphere, is primarily tied to “private” spaces.

Interestingly, while Kitty Genovese encountered assistance in public space – Winston Moseley ran off when a bystander screamed at him, arguably a form of intervention – her tragic fate unfolded *inside* the apartment complex, where she was ultimately raped and killed out of the bystanders' sight. Further, some bystanders reportedly expressed a reluctance to intervene in what they perceived as a “lovers' quarrel” between a man and a woman (Rosenthal, 1964). In the 1960s, such disputes were treated as a private concern that did not warrant legal involvement (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Farris & Holman, 2015; Kuennen, 2010; Schneider, 2008), highlighting the private sphere as one that may be unsafe in the absence of legal or state intervention. Was the case of Kitty Genovese, then, really *exclusively* a case of gendered violence in public, or was it perhaps also, in part, about the “private” – both in how it unfolded and how it may have been perceived by bystanders? Sixty years have passed since the Kitty Genovese case, and the effects of its media portrayal profound, but what do we actually *know* about actual bystander behavior in gendered violence in public space? Is the often-assumed risk of bystander passivity in gendered violence in public space, spurred by the Kitty Genovese case, justified? And what if Kitty Genovese and Winston Moseley had been partners, and the (entire) attack had occurred in a “private” space rather than in public? What role do bystanders play in violence that occurs in these spaces, where women are particularly at risk?

In this dissertation, I aim to bring back the “gendered particulars” to research on bystander behavior in violent emergencies. Specifically, I will focus on the following overarching question: What role does gender play in bystander behavior in violent situations in public and private spaces? To thoroughly investigate bystander behavior in gendered violent contexts, it is important to move beyond public space, and to include those spaces where women are, somewhat paradoxically, most at risk. In doing so, I will include intimate partner violence (IPV), which has traditionally been neglected in research on violence and has developed as a relatively isolated research discipline (Walby et al., 2014). By integrating research on bystander behavior in violence occurring both in public and private spaces, my intention is to unite these disciplines, to broaden our knowledge on bystander behavior across contexts, and to shed light on the diversity of bystander behavior, which has often been oversimplified as either active or passive (Bloch et al., 2019).

This dissertation draws upon real-life data from diverse settings, including CCTV footage of naturally occurring conflicts in public space and case files detailing incidents of IPV reported by bystanders. The aim is to provide insights into the actual actions of bystanders rather than solely relying on self-reported accounts in hypothetical scenarios, which, in particular in the context of IPV, has traditionally been the case (see Kuskoff & Parsell, 2024). In the sections that follow, I will first discuss the literature on bystanders, and elaborate on the literature on bystander behavior and gender. I will then discuss the limitations of previous studies, and how this project aims to bridge the gaps, which is followed by an outline of this dissertation.

Bystander effect

It was the murder of Kitty Genovese that sparked the field of research on bystander behavior. While the perceived bystander inaction in the case of Kitty Genovese was colloquially attributed to individual human apathy and indifference in the media, social psychologists Darley and Latané (1968) argued that the explanation for non-intervention should, instead, be sought in a situational component: the presence of other bystanders. Therefore, they conducted an experiment in which they simulated an epileptic seizure in various conditions: a scenario where the emergency was heard by a bystander alone, and a scenario where one or four unseen others were also present. Based on their results, indicating that bystanders were less likely to intervene in the presence of others, it was stated that “the more bystanders to an emergency, the less likely, or more slowly, any one bystander will intervene to provide help” (Darley & Latané, 1968, p. 378), a phenomenon coined as the “bystander effect”. What followed was a range of experimental studies, as part of a research program by Bibb Latané and John Darley, which led to the conclusion that the presence of passive others results inhibits bystander intervention (e.g., Latané & Darley, 1968, 1970; Latané & Rodin, 1969), though this effect was found to diminish if bystanders were actually facing each other (Darley et al., 1973). Based on a meta-analysis of prior studies, Latané and Nida (1981) concluded that “the original phenomenon discovered by Latané and Darley has a firm empirical foundation and has withstood the tests of time and replication.” (p. 322).

According to Latané and Darley (1970), intervention occurs through a psychological process that entails five steps, where bystanders have to: 1) notice the event, 2) interpret the situation as an emergency, 3) decide that it their responsibility to act, 4) decide how to intervene, and 5) implement the act of intervention. Yet, intervention

may be inhibited in groups due to 1) diffusion of responsibility, 2) evaluation apprehension, and 3) pluralistic ignorance (Latané & Darley, 1970). Specifically, they argued, the presence of a group results in the division of personal responsibility among all bystanders, meaning that the more bystanders are present, the less personal responsibility bystanders will feel (i.e., diffusion of responsibility). Further, bystanders may fear being judged by others when they act in public settings (i.e., evaluation apprehension), and may interpret bystanders' reactions in ambiguous situations as proof that help is not needed (i.e., pluralistic ignorance) (Latané & Darley, 1970). As pointed out by various scholars, the bystander effect is perceived as one of the most established findings in social psychology, is often mentioned in psychology textbooks, and is ingrained in today's public understanding of helping behavior (Fischer et al., 2011; Griggs & Proctor, 2002; Manning et al., 2007; Levine et al., 2011).

Bystanders as active

While the story of Kitty Genovese as presented in the media proved to be factually inaccurate, recent research additionally suggests that the bystander effect is, in fact, more nuanced and, in some cases, may even be reversed, challenging the assumption of bystander passivity (Fischer et al., 2011; Philpot et al., 2020; Stalder, 2008). Although several exceptions to the bystander effect were already noted in the early bystander literature, such as that bystanders *facing each other* were not less likely to respond than bystanders who were alone (Darley et al., 1973), additional studies have furthered our understanding of bystanders as active. In 2008, Stalder corrected an error in Latané and Nida's (1981) often-cited meta-analysis, and found that, under restricted communication (i.e., bystanders are separated but know of each other's presence), victims were *more* likely to receive help from a group than from an individual. Further, new analyses suggested that an increase in group size also increased the likelihood of a victim receiving help, which remained under full communication (i.e., bystanders could see or communicate with each other) (Stalder, 2008). While the author focused on victim's likelihood of receiving help – which represents a different phenomenon than individual's probability to help as number of bystanders increases, an important distinction that is often eluded in research (Stalder, 2008) – these findings nevertheless indicate that, at least for victims, groups can be particularly helpful in emergencies. Further, in their meta-analysis, Fischer and colleagues (2011) found that in actual emergencies, in which communication is real rather than manipulated, and in which individuals are actual bystanders rather than instructed confederates or implied bystanders, additional bystanders

lead to *more* individual helping behavior. In addition, recent research relying on real-life conflicts in public space suggests that the likelihood that at least someone will intervene increases when the number of bystanders increase, and – contrary to common belief – intervention occurred in the vast majority of conflicts (Philpot et al., 2020), suggesting that bystanders are far more active than the early bystander literature has implied.

Given the focus on the bystander effect, for which the presence of others is critical to consider, much of the early social psychological research has centered on bystander behavior in emergencies in (semi-)public spaces. While it is increasingly known that bystanders are active in violent contexts in public spaces (e.g., Lindegaard et al., 2022; Liebst et al., 2019; Philpot et al., 2020), this raises the question how bystanders act in violence that occurs in *private* spaces. Indeed, bystanders may still be present or aware and able to offer help, and including bystanders in violence that typically occurs outside the public realm is particularly important to ensure that such forms of violence do not remain invisible and reinforced as private matters. This is especially important in the context of IPV, which has been treated as a “private” matter throughout much of history. Over the past few decades, the potential of bystanders in preventing or terminating IPV has been increasingly recognized. Despite IPV often occurring in residential settings, research suggests that there are nevertheless often bystanders (e.g., neighbors, family) who at some point witness it or otherwise become aware. Similar to violence in public space, there is increasing evidence that bystanders of IPV may be more active than initially assumed. While estimates of bystander intervention are difficult to come by, studies report intervention rates ranging from 26% to 76% of individuals who either intervened in IPV themselves or had someone intervene on their behalf (Kuskoff & Parsell, 2024; Taket et al., 2014; Weitzman et al., 2020). To conclude, the bystander effect is far more nuanced than previously assumed, and the available evidence suggests that bystanders are generally far from passive, both in violent emergencies in public and private spaces. As such, to advance our knowledge of bystander behavior, it is imperative to depart from conventional assumptions of bystander passivity, and, rather than questioning why bystanders fail to intervene, shift focus to understanding how bystanders actively engage themselves in violent situations.

Variety of bystander actions

By studying bystander actions in real-life situations, researchers have discovered that intervention is not as binary as it was constructed in the lab, and bystanders engage in a much greater variety of actions than previously assumed. Much of the bystander literature has assumed that bystander behavior can be divided into a binary distinction between active and passive behavior, where intervention is quantified as something bystanders either do or do not do (Bloch et al., 2019). In particular early bystander studies have categorized bystanders as passive if they did not meet the threshold of a pre-established measure of intervention. Yet, relying on CCTV footage of real-life violent incidents, Bloch and colleagues (2019) found that bystanders engaged in a diversity of actions, including distancing (e.g., ignoring), ambivalence (e.g., fidgeting, passive surveillance), and involvement (e.g., practical, physical intervention, care), that challenge the assumption that bystander actions are either passive or active. This not only means that acts of intervention tend to be more diverse than often assumed, but also suggests that considering other actions, that may not involve acts of intervention, is essential to further our understanding of bystander behavior. As much of the previous research has analyzed strategies of bystander *intervention*, this also means that the focus of interest centers on those who do intervene while excluding strategies that bystanders may use to *prevent* becoming involved. Importantly, bystanders' lack of intervention does not imply a lack of hesitation, concern or potentially helpful actions that do not align with typical intervention measures (Bloch et al., 2019). As argued by Becker (2004), individuals are “always acting, doing something, trying to do something, and looking to the environment, searching it, for ways to accomplish whatever they are trying to do” (p. 2). As real-life bystander behavior cannot be fully grasped by the commonly used distinction between active and passive, it is important to reassess and broaden current categories of bystander behavior in violent incidents (Bloch et al., 2019).

The variety of bystander actions has not only been recognized in violence occurring in public space, but also in other contexts, including IPV and sexual violence. Various intervention opportunities have been identified that extend beyond physical or confrontational actions, including, for instance, prevention-focused intervention through educational programs or trainings aimed at addressing attitudes and beliefs (Mainwaring et al., 2023). Further, indirect intervention opportunities during incidents have been identified, such as distracting the perpetrator or delegating tasks to other bystanders, which may help defuse a situation without direct confrontation (Kaya et al., 2020; McMahan et al., 2013). While bystanders appear to actively engage themselves in both violence in public and IPV, it should be acknowledged that *how*

they engage themselves may vary. Although conflicts in public settings typically evolve as isolated incidents between individuals with a relationship limited in depth and scope (Emerson, 2015), IPV often involves a prolonged pattern between current or former partners, spanning a median duration ranging across studies from 1 to 10 years (Bonomi et al., 2007; Thompson et al., 2006). This not only means that bystanders of IPV may be particularly likely to maintain a close relationship with the victim and/or perpetrator (e.g., neighbors, family members, friends), but also that their intervention strategies may involve actions aimed at *patterns* of violence rather than immediate actions during violent encounters, such as offering long-term emotional support or involving formal authorities. Previous research suggests that bystander intervention in IPV comes with several barriers and challenges, and bystanders often fear for their own safety if they get involved, which may inhibit their willingness to intervene (Gregory et al., 2017; Latta, 2008; Weitzman et al., 2020). In contrast to intervention in violent encounters in public space, where contrary to common beliefs, the risk of victimization tends to be low (Liebst et al., 2019), studies have found that supporting victims of IPV may result in threats, intimidation or even violence from the perpetrator (Gregory, 2017; Gregory et al., 2017). As such, while bystanders often initially engage in informal forms of intervention, such as offering support, they may turn to formal systems for help – when they perceive these systems as effective and willing to act – if situations cannot be resolved and/or involve high levels of threat and violence (Emerson, 2015).

Involving a formal authority that can offer professional assistance, such as alerting a domestic violence agency responsible for organizing help, could potentially be a useful form of intervention for addressing patterns of IPV and increasing long-term safety, rather than focusing on terminating isolated incidents (e.g., physically intervening or calling the police during a violent episode). Yet, much of the research on IPV has focused on whether bystanders would intervene in a specific (hypothetical) IPV incident by using predefined categories of intervention, potentially overlooking actions that bystanders may engage in over time that center on addressing patterns of IPV as opposed to specific incidents. To conclude, it is essential to acknowledge the variety of actions available to bystanders that go beyond active or passive, as we may otherwise oversimplify bystander behavior and fail to capture its complexity and diversity in real-life situations. This means that we should not only consider what bystanders do *beyond* acts of intervention, but also consider types of intervention that focus on formal systems, including those that offer professional help aimed at addressing patterns of IPV.

Bystander behavior and gender

Previous research suggests that men and women respond differently to stress, with women's responses particularly focusing on the protection of children and affiliating with others, described as a “tend and befriend” response, whereas men are more likely to engage in fight or flight responses (Taylor et al., 2000). In terms of bystander behavior specifically, men and women have additionally been found to engage in different forms of intervention behavior. More specifically, studies relying on CCTV data of real-life emergencies indicate that men were more likely to intervene physically in violent incidents in public space (Liebst et al., 2019), whereas women have been found to be more likely to engage in consolation to robbery victims (Lindegaard et al., 2017). Further, studies generally suggest that women are more willing to intervene in IPV and sexual violence, in particular when considering indirect forms of intervention, whereas men are more prone to direct and physical confrontation (Banyard et al., 2020; Bennett et al., 2017; Berkowitz et al., 2023; Casper et al., 2021; Cook & Reynald, 2016; Mainwaring et al., 2023; Sylaska & Walters, 2014). More generally, the body of literature on prosocial behavior (i.e., voluntary behavior intended to benefit others; Eisenberg et al., 2006) suggests that women are more likely to engage in caring and nurturing behaviors, while men are more inclined towards strength-intensive forms of prosocial behavior (Eagly, 2009; Dovidio & Penner, 2004; Eagly & Crowley, 1986). As such, the available literature indicates that while bystanders tend to engage in a variety of bystander actions, these actions additionally tend to display gender differences.

Prior to discussing the literature on bystander behavior and gender in more detail, it is important to elaborate on the conceptualization of ‘gender’ in this dissertation. As defined by Scott (2007), gender can be seen as “a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power” (p. 71). As such, gender structures social hierarchies and inequalities, that are, rather than natural or inherent, maintained through practices and institutions. Importantly, within the institutions we inhabit, we “create and re-create our own gendered identities within the contexts of our interactions with others” (Kimmel, 2000, p. 104). In addition to gender identity (i.e., the extent to which individuals self-identify internally with regards to being male, female, a combination of both or neither, which may change over time and across contexts), individuals may actively construct and express that identity in their interactions through their performance (West & Zimmerman, 1987). As argued by West and Zimmerman (1987), individuals “do gender” in their interactions with others who may evaluate us by performing activities or exhibiting traits prescribed

to us, and by doing so “simultaneously sustain, reproduce and render legitimate the institutional arrangements that are based on sex category [whereas if we] fail to do gender appropriately, we as individuals – not the institutional arrangements – may be called to account” (p. 146). This dissertation concentrates on the expression and enactment of gender through social behaviors and interactions, rather than on individuals' internal sense of their own gender. As such, it is important to acknowledge that when referring to “men” or “women” throughout the next chapters, this is based on these expressions which may or may not be consistent with the extent to which individuals self-identify in terms of gender.

Within the literature, the nuances in prosocial behavior have generally been explained from both evolutionary theories, attributing this to intrinsic sex differences as a result of evolution, and the social role theory, proposing that such differences are the result of individuals enacting learned gender role expectations. From the social role perspective, the kind of help that men and women may provide is determined by the extent to which this behavior fits their gender role, consisting of a set of societal and cultural norms about how individuals should behave based on their biological sex (Dovidio & Penner, 2004). The male gender role is typically associated with agency (i.e., being assertive and independent), which may result in greater expectation of helping behaviors that are more heroic and chivalrous, whereas the female gender role revolves around communion, and expects women to be caring and nurturing in their helping (Dovidio & Penner, 2004). Yet, while it is evident that there are societal expectations in terms of how individuals should behave based on their biological sex, it is important to acknowledge that individuals “do not simply inherit a male or female sex role, but we actively – interactively – constantly define and redefine what it means to be men or women in daily encounters with one another” (Kimmel, 2000, p. 106). As such, these roles are dynamic, rather than fixed or static, and provide individuals with scripts that they may draw on in particular contexts, where displaying action, risks and aggression in public can be ways to perform masculinity, and humble and caring behaviors to perform femininity in specific situations (Bosson & Vandello, 2011; Prentice & Carranza, 2002; Vandello & Bosson, 2013). Importantly, the body of literature has traditionally predominantly focused on short-term encounters with strangers and that are perceived as “heroic”, thus applying a narrow understanding of prosocial behavior that leaves out other forms of helping (Eagly, 2009). Yet, by focusing on bystander behavior in emergencies that is displayed in overt and strength-intensive ways, we risk overlooking forms of less overt bystander behavior that might not fit with such male-oriented types of intervention. As such, the variety of bystander actions that bystanders may engage in is not only important to understand the diversity and complexity of these actions, but also to ensure that we

capture a complete picture of these behaviors and do not overlook forms of less direct or more nuanced bystander behaviors that may be more prevalent among women. As such, this necessitates an approach that allows us to observe *how* bystanders who present as man and women act during such violent encounters in real-life situations.

As mentioned, the early studies seeking to understand how the case of Kitty Genovese could have occurred initially rarely considered the gendered nature of the incident. To analyze the interplay of bystander behavior, violence, and gender, it is essential to consider not only the gender of the bystanders but also how gendered violent incidents impact bystander behavior. To do so, it is important to consider how violence develops within and across space. Despite high rates of fear of crime in public spaces among women, official statistics indicate that physical violence against women by strangers is relatively rare and more likely to occur between men (Gardner, 1995; Mooney, 2018; Rader, 2023). Nonetheless, violent crime is not primarily constituted by men against men, as women are particularly at risk for forms of violence that remain invisible in crime statistics, and are statistically most at risk of violence perpetrated by men they know in domestic spaces (Bondi & Rose, 2003; Rader, 2023; Walby et al., 2014). Yet, gender does not only appear to influence where violence occurs, but also how violence is perceived. This may be attributed to violence being constructed as part of normative masculine gender performances, where violence between men is perceived as justified or natural, whereas violence against women may be constructed as unacceptable due to the perceived ability of men to cause harm to women (Carlson, 2008; Cobbina et al., 2010; Hollander, 2001; Ravn, 2018; Sundaram, 2013). Indeed, previous studies indicate that individuals do not only express more disapproval but also report a greater likelihood to intervene when they encounter a man's aggression against a woman compared to man-to-man aggression and woman-to-man aggression (Felson & Feld, 2009; Hamby & Jackson, 2010; Moule & Powers, 2021; Sorenson & Taylor 2005). Yet, while there is quite some research on this relying on vignette studies depicting hypothetical scenarios, studies relying on observations of real-life violent incident are relatively scarce.

While the literature seems to suggest that women may, in fact, be more likely to receive help from bystanders in violent situations compared to men, there is some evidence that the existence or perceptions of a close relationship between a man and a woman may inhibit bystander intervention (Ermer et al., 2021; Rogers et al., 2019; Shotland & Straw, 1979). As mentioned, the presumed bystander passivity in the Kitty Genovese case appeared to be, in part, motivated by bystanders' reluctance to intervene in what they perceived as a "lover's quarrel" (Rosenthal, 1964). For much of the history in the Netherlands, IPV has been treated as a private matter.

While an important shift emerged in the Netherlands in the 1970s, when domestic violence was put on the social agenda and emerged as public problem of epidemic proportions, violence against women was initially only approached as a public issue when it occurred in the public domain (Mellaard, 2022; Römken, 2010). While public attitudes have generally shifted more towards IPV as a matter of public concern (Meyer, 2012), the limited available evidence appears to suggest that perceptions of conflicts or violence between intimate partners may nevertheless still be perceived as “private matters” that elicit less intervention compared to violence between non-intimates (Ermer et al., 2021; Rogers et al., 2019). As such, this points towards the importance of including intimate relationships when examining bystander behavior and gender, and necessitates the use of real-life data to complement previous research that has often utilized experimental designs.

While it is apparent that the gender composition of violent situations may influence bystander perceptions, it is important to acknowledge that gender also plays a role in shaping the dynamics of IPV. As argued by Johnson (1995, 2011), IPV is not a unitary phenomenon, but it encompasses various forms, with the two most common forms consisting of *situational couple violence* and *intimate terrorism*. While *situational couple violence* is rooted in situational escalation of conflict and roughly gender-symmetric in its perpetration, and does not involve attempts to gain control over the other, *intimate terrorism* is perpetrated predominantly by men against women, is more frequent and severe, and less likely to be mutual (Johnson, 1995, 2006, 2011). In this form of IPV, in which misogyny and gender traditionalism play an important role, violence is used as a tactic in a general pattern of coercion and control over women (Johnson, 2011). Johnson's typology has offered a crucial understanding of these different forms of IPV, showing how matters of coercion and control are heavily influenced by gender, for which overwhelming support has been found (Conroy et al., 2022). Note that while *intimate terrorism* is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men against women in heterosexual relationships, *intimate terrorism* can also be perpetrated by women and in same-gender relationships (Johnson, 2008, 2011). Yet, while LGBTQ+ experiences have gained recognition in recent years, IPV in same-gender or gender-queer couples has still not received the same legitimacy and research attention compared to heterosexual couples, and there is relatively little research on the typology in same-gender relationships (Cannon & Buttell, 2016; Conroy et al., 2022; Estes & Webber, 2017; Johnson, 2008; Little, 2020). It is important to recognize that these various forms of IPV may also impact how bystanders perceive and respond to IPV. Indeed, *intimate terrorism*, typically perpetrated by men against women, tends to be more severe, and victim and offender roles may be easier to distinguish for bystanders compared to *situational couple violence*, in which both partners may reside to violence

and which may be perceived as more ambiguous. Yet, while gender composition and its association with bystander intervention during violence has been extensively studied through vignette designs, research has rarely considered how bystander actions may potentially be shaped by these dynamics, which are intertwined with gender.

Limitations of previous studies

If we want to understand what bystanders *do* in specific situations, as opposed to their perceptions or attitudes, it is essential to study their actual behaviors in natural settings. Yet, research designs that focus on bystander behavior in emergencies are restricted by ethical and practical implications that limit the ability to study bystander behavior in violent situations in natural settings. While the case of Kitty Genovese consisted of a violent attack, and, as such, represented an actual emergency with a high level of danger (Fischer et al., 2011), early studies on bystander behavior have staged other emergencies, including an epileptic seizure (Darley & Latané, 1968), the onset of a fire (Latané & Darley, 1968), an asthma attack (Harris & Robinson, 1973), a choking fit (Gottlieb & Carver, 1980), a woman falling (Latané & Rodin, 1969), and have also focused on mundane situations to analyze bystander behavior, such as someone dropping a pencil (Latané & Dabbs, 1975) or opening a door (Peter et al., 1972). These experimental designs typically confront participants with staged emergencies either alone or in the presence of others, with the other bystanders consisting of confederates instructed by the research team *not* to intervene (Fischer et al., 2011). Not only does this prevent any dynamics among bystanders to naturally occur, it also results in an overestimation of the bystander effect: When bystanders consist of only actual individuals, rather than including some confederates, the bystander effect has been found to be reversed, where additional bystanders, in fact, lead to more helping (Fischer et al., 2011).

Although some of these experiments provide setups that may be similar to an emergency (e.g., a medical emergency), the nature of these emergencies presented to bystanders does not entail any form of *violence*. As such, these studies offer insights into specific situations, but the extent to which they can be applied to understand how bystanders act in violent emergencies is questionable. While a few early bystander studies have simulated violent attacks (Borofsky et al., 1971; Shotland & Straw, 1979), staging a severe violent situation (or other emergency) would violate contemporary ethical guidelines and regulations as a result of the potential distress that participants may encounter (Levine & Crowther, 2008; Lindegaard et al., 2021),

as such limiting the possibilities to analyze bystander behavior in natural occurrences of violence.

As mentioned, the gendered nature of the violent incident that sparked the bystander literature was rarely included in early bystander studies that aimed to understand how such situations could happen (Cherry, 1995; though see Borofsky et al., 1971; Shotland & Straw, 1979 for exceptions). As argued by Cherry (1995), these simulations of generalized bystander behavior exemplify how meaning can be stripped from events in research, though “this is not surprising given that in 1964 we lived in a world that did not recognize by name the widespread abuse of women.” (p. 21). Importantly, gender is often left out in research on violence within mainstream disciplines criminology and sociology (Walby et al., 2014). This is reflective of a larger phenomenon within the field, where, as argued by Sharp (2006), “the majority of criminological research in the top-tier journals still either ignores women or treats gender as a control variable.” (p. 3). This is not limited to criminology but reflects a general phenomenon within science, in which men have historically been treated as the default whereas women have been under-represented in academic studies, resulting in gender data gaps across a range of disciplines, including, for example, medicine and technology (Perez, 2019). If research on bystander intervention – and prosocial behavior more generally – has traditionally concentrated on overt and strength-intensive forms of helping, this raises the question of whether we are accurately describing bystanders as a whole, including women, or if we have – at least in the initial studies – predominantly focused on men bystanders.

Importantly, a body of literature on bystander intervention in gendered violence has emerged within a relatively isolated discipline, which has contributed to the inclusion of women in bystander research. This has been instrumental in enhancing our knowledge on the individual and situational aspects that may influence bystanders' intentions to intervene, and has resulted in the development of a variety of bystander programs. Due to ethical guidelines and the inherent challenge of observing gendered violence, often occurring behind closed doors, on the spot, the possibilities to analyze how bystanders respond in real-life situations are limited. Therefore, it is not surprising that the vast majority of studies have relied on vignette designs to identify what factors may encourage or inhibit individuals' willingness to intervene in hypothetical scenarios (e.g., Bennett et al., 2017; Berkowitz et al., 2023; Kuijpers et al., 2021; Sylaska & Walters, 2014). While vignette designs allow researchers to analyze measures such as attitudes, beliefs and perceptions, which is particularly useful for sensitive research topics that are otherwise difficult to capture, it also comes with challenges in terms of internal validity (Erfanian, 2020;

Hughes & Huby, 2004). Indeed, previous research suggests that what individuals say they would do in a hypothetical scenario does not correspond well to their *actual* behavior (Baumeister et al., 2007; Eifler, 2007; Jerolmack & Khan, 2014). The discrepancy between hypothetical actions and actual behavior has also been found in IPV, with bystanders vastly overestimating their own hypothetical involvement in IPV situations (Sánchez-Prada et al., 2022). As argued by Nabi and colleagues (2002), who similarly found that intentions to act in domestic violence did not predict actual behavior, the intention to act in domestic violence does not capture the *complexity* of the context in which such actions in reality occur (e.g., physical circumstances of the incident, their feelings about the perpetrator and/or victim, their own perceived risks). For example, the potential real-life consequences of bystander actions, and the negative impact on psychological well-being that bystanders may experience in relation to their involvement (Gregory et al., 2017), may not be adequately captured using such designs. Further, gender differences in bystander intervention in studies based on vignette designs tend to be greater compared to studies relying on real-life situations (Mainwaring et al., 2023), suggesting that the former studies may not only overestimate bystander intervention, but may also exacerbate certain differences that are less pronounced in real-life situations.

In addition, many previous studies that rely on vignettes have used convenience samples of college students, which may not be representative of the general population. The dynamics of IPV and the opportunities for and consequences of bystander intervention differ compared to other demographic groups, as college students are, for example, less likely to have children, to live together or to be economically dependent compared to older individuals (Kuskoff & Parsell, 2024). In addition to vignette designs, previous research has utilized interviews and surveys to gain insights into the experiences of bystanders of IPV. Although these methods offer insights that cannot be captured used vignette designs, they also come with certain limitations. As they are typically retrospective in nature, they may result in recall bias, making it challenging for individuals to accurately recall specific details about the situation, their own involvement, and the reasoning behind their actions. As such, scholars have called for the need to rely on data sources that offer insights into *actual* experiences of bystander intervention in IPV (Kuskoff & Parsell, 2024).

For a thorough understanding of bystander behavior in gendered violent contexts, it is imperative to incorporate research concerning bystander behavior within contexts of violent incidents occurring in both public and private spheres. By focusing exclusively on bystander behaviors in violent situations in public space, where physical violence is more likely to occur between men, we may inadvertently neglect

the experiences of women who become victims in “private” settings and perpetuate perceptions of IPV as a private phenomenon that is distinct from violence in public space. In addition, by focusing exclusively on bystander behavior in violence in public space, we prioritize strength-intensive forms of helping and risk overlooking forms of less overt forms of bystander behavior.

Bridging the (methodological) gap

As research on bystander behavior in actual violent situations is bounded by ethical regulations, and researchers rarely witness criminal behavior directly in a natural setting (Lindegaard & Bernasco, 2018), closed-circuit television (CCTV) surveillance footage has more recently been used by scholars as a data source to analyze what bystanders do in real-life violent situations in public space (e.g., Ejbye-Ernst et al., 2022; Levine et al., 2011; Liebst et al., 2019; Philpot et al., 2020). Importantly, analyzing real-life situations that emerge in natural settings results in a high ecological validity, and allows researchers to systematically and unobtrusively observe how such situations develop, in particular in terms of situational and interactional dynamics that are difficult to capture otherwise (Lindegaard & Bernasco, 2018). Additional advantages consist of the possibility to observe the same event repeatedly, to play it back in slow motion, and to watch and analyze the same situation with multiple observers, as such enhancing reliability. As such, CCTV footage is useful in overcoming ethical and practical implications that limit the ability to study violent situations in natural settings, and its usage offers a novel approach within the social sciences that enables us to observe aspects of bystander behavior that traditional methods are unable to capture.

Importantly, the emerging body of research relying on CCTV footage to examine bystander behavior in real-life violent situations has provided novel insights that challenge commonly held beliefs of bystander passivity and that paint a rather different picture of bystander behavior in emergencies than decades of laboratory studies have so far indicated. In the first study to use CCTV footage of aggressive incidents in public space, Levine and colleagues (2011) found that bystanders inhibited, rather than facilitated, the likelihood of violence, which increased as the group size expanded. Recent research relying on CCTV footage across various countries additionally indicates that bystanders often intervene in conflicts in public space, with intervention occurring in 9 out of 10 conflicts (Philpot et al., 2020). Further, bystander intervention has been found to be helpful, in particular if it is physically forceful (Ejbye-Ernst et al., 2022), and it is particularly common

in situations where there is a high level of danger (Lindegaard et al., 2022). These novel insights make it evident that relying on real-life data to examine bystander behavior in violent situations is crucial for advancing our scientific understanding of how such behavior develops in real-life emergencies. Therefore, in this dissertation, I will utilize CCTV footage to include the performance of gender in our analysis of bystander behavior in violent emergencies, allowing us to observe how bystanders presenting as men and women actually *behave* during violent emergencies in natural settings across various gender compositions. This is particularly important because the body of literature has predominantly been informed by experiments that do not reflect (gendered) violence and vignette studies that focus on hypothetical actions, and this allows us to gain an accurate understanding of the variety of bystander actions that bystanders may engage in that go beyond the overt forms of helping behaviors that have traditionally been the focus.

Although CCTV footage is useful to analyze bystander behavior in public settings, violence that occurs in residential settings is more difficult to observe. As such, it is not surprising that studies focusing on IPV violence have primarily relied on hypothetical reports of bystander behavior. However, if most of our scientific knowledge is derived from such designs, which may not accurately reflect actual behavior and could overestimate bystander involvement, this calls into question what we truly know about *actual* bystander behavior in IPV. While capturing data of real-life bystander behavior in IPV is undoubtedly challenging, there are other rich sources of data available that may provide insights into *actual* experiences of bystander intervention in IPV, including administrative data. These additional data sources are particularly useful to complement previous research that has relied heavily on vignette designs, as they provide new opportunities to examine the impacts and outcomes of bystander intervention and may offer a more nuanced and comprehensive overview of bystanders' actions in real-life cases of IPV (Kuskoff & Parsell, 2024). To fill this gap, this dissertation will use data from an official domestic violence agency, *Safe at Home*, which operates a helpline where bystanders can report their suspicions of domestic violence. These case files include statements from bystanders – whom we know have actually intervened by reporting – reflecting their experiences and perceptions recorded at the time of the report. Knowledge based on such real-life experiences is imperative to move the scientific field forward, and may be particularly informative with regards to practice and policy implications. While the CCTV footage allows us to analyze how actual bystander behavior develops in real-life natural situations in public space, and provides insights into *how* bystanders act in these situations, the case files allow to analyze *why* bystanders intervene in real-life situations that typically occur outside the public realm. In this dissertation,

I, therefore, aim to fill these gaps by bringing together various data sources and methodologies to enhance our understanding of bystander behavior, gender and violence in both public and private spaces.

Outline of this dissertation

The next two chapters, Chapters 2 and 3, focus on bystander actions during real-life conflicts in public space, using video analysis of CCTV footage. These chapters center on the question *what* bystanders actually do, in real-life violent situations, and how these bystander actions may be associated with gender. In Chapter 2, I will first unpack the variety of bystander behavior by qualitatively analyzing in what actions bystanders engage during conflicts. This is particularly important given the complexity of bystander behavior that does not lend itself for a binary approach of active versus passive behavior. By examining the broad spectrum of actions available to bystanders, we gain further insights into what bystanders do when they do *not* intervene – which is currently not well-understood – and we expand our understanding beyond strength-intensive and male-oriented forms of helping. Second, I will analyze to what extent bystanders presenting as men and women overlap or vary in their enactment of these various actions during conflicts. By relying on real-life data, we are able to gain a systematic overview of such potential gender differences or similarities in real-life conflicts as opposed to hypothetical scenarios, which may overemphasize certain gender differences.

In Chapter 3, I will analyze to what extent the gender composition and perceived intimate ties of conflict parties influence the likelihood of bystander intervention during conflicts in public space. While the association between gender composition and bystander intervention has been studied in previous research, this has overwhelmingly been examined using hypothetical reports. As hypothetical reports do not necessarily reflect actual behavior, it is crucial to systematically observe how bystanders act in real-life situations if we want to further our scientific understanding of bystander behavior in gendered violence. Despite the Kitty Genovese case having been inaccurately portrayed, and recent research challenging notions of bystander passivity, public perceptions of not being helped by others appear to remain persistent. Research consistently shows that women feel more unsafe in public space and more often engage in avoidance strategies compared to men, which may limit how women act, move and navigate through space and may reinforce constructions of public space as a male space (Bondi & Rose, 2003; Condon et al., 2007; Pain, 1997; Spain, 2014). As such, gaining insights into what bystanders *actually* do in gendered violence that occurs in natural

situations – which we currently have surprisingly little knowledge of – does not only contribute to our scientific understanding of bystander behavior, but may additionally be useful to tailor intervention efforts aimed at enhancing feelings of public safety.

In Chapters 4 and 5, the focus centers on bystanders of IPV who intervened by reporting their suspicions to the domestic violence agency *Safe at Home*, using case files that reflect statements from bystanders. Rather than focusing on *what* bystanders do, these chapters center on the question *why* bystanders do what they do – intervening in real-life IPV situations – and how gender may play a role in this. In Chapter 4, I will use a qualitative analysis to uncover bystanders' reasons to intervene in IPV by reporting their suspicions – as stated in their interactions with the agency. While a plethora of research has focused on hypothetical bystander involvement in IPV, bystanders' statements about their perspectives, experiences, and circumstances surrounding their intervention behavior, have rarely been considered. Gaining insights into the motivations and reasoning from bystanders who actually intervened – as stated in their interactions – is not only necessary to further our understanding of bystander behavior across contexts, but may also offer practical insights in terms of intervention efforts in domestic violence. In addition, the reasons for reporting among men and women and across type of IPV (i.e., *intimate terrorism* and *situational couple violence*) will be analyzed to examine to what extent these gender dynamics may influence bystanders' reasoning to report their suspicions.² Doing so fills an important gap in the literature, which has often focused on gender and likelihood or type of intervention (i.e., *what* bystanders do) but has rarely considered how gender – both of the bystanders and of the involved parties – may influence bystanders' reasoning regarding intervention (i.e., *why* they do so in specific situations).

In Chapter 5, the focus centers on *anonymous* reporting as a form of bystander intervention in IPV, by using a qualitative approach to uncover bystanders' reasons for reporting their suspicions anonymously. Compared to direct, physical involvement that may be applied when intervening in violent incidents in public space, anonymous reporting represents an indirect form of intervention that cannot be traced back to the bystander. As elaborated earlier, it is important to acknowledge the variety of actions available to bystanders, and to consider how various forms of intervention may be applied over time during situations that represent patterns of violence. Specifically, in the context of IPV, in which bystanders often experience fear for retaliation, it is crucial to consider alternative forms of intervention available to bystanders. By reporting

2. Note that while bystanders' perceptions and reasoning to intervene in IPV perpetrated by a woman against a man and same-gender IPV may also vary, there were insufficient cases to examine these in the study.

suspicious anonymously, bystanders still involve an authority that can offer professional help, but they may potentially be protected from certain consequences because their identity is not revealed. In addition, I will consider what implications anonymity holds for men and women who reported their suspicions of IPV anonymously to gain further insights into the diverse spectrum of intervention actions among men and women and to understand the role gender may play in these actions. As anonymous reporting has rarely been studied beyond experimental designs, an understanding of the meaning of anonymity to bystanders and their reasoning behind this may offer a valuable contribution to the literature, which is particularly important because experiments may not fully capture bystanders' experiences.

For a broader understanding of bystander behavior that goes beyond a binary understanding of active versus passive, it is crucial to integrate analyses of these various forms of violence rather than examining them in isolation, and to consider the variety of bystander behaviors across contexts, ranging from immediate intervention to anonymous reporting. A detailed overview of the research questions and data sources can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Overview of the research questions and data

Chapter	Focus	Data	Method	Research questions
2	Conflicts in public space	CCTV footage of interpersonal conflicts in public space	Mixed methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. How do bystanders act in interpersonal conflicts in public space? b. To what extent are bystanders' gender presentations associated with their enactment of these actions?
3	Conflicts in public space	CCTV footage of interpersonal conflicts in public space	Mixed methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Does the bystander intervention likelihood differ between conflicts between men and conflicts between a man and a woman? b. Does the likelihood of bystander intervention changes when conflicts occur between individuals perceived as having intimate ties?
4	Intimate partner violence	Case files from <i>Safe at Home</i>	Qualitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Why do bystanders intervene by reporting their suspicions of IPV to an official domestic violence agency? b. Do bystanders' reasons to report their suspicions differ between <i>intimate terrorism</i> and <i>situational couple violence</i>? c. Do gendered patterns emerge in terms of reporting <i>intimate terrorism</i> and <i>situational couple violence</i>?
5	Intimate partner violence	Case files from <i>Safe at Home</i>	Qualitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Why do bystanders report their suspicions of IPV anonymously to an official domestic violence agency? b. To what extent does anonymity hold varying implications for men and women?

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Chapter 2

Bystander action beyond intervention: Video-observing the bystander behavior of men and women in real-life public conflicts

Van Baak, C., Hoeben, E.M., Liebst, L.S., Weenink, D., & Lindegaard, M.R. (2024). Bystander action beyond intervention: Video-observing behavior of bystanders in public conflicts. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605241270051>

CVB conceptualized the research and methodology, coded the data, conducted the formal analysis, and wrote the text. EH contributed to conceptualization and methodology, collected the data, and reviewed and edited the text. LSL contributed to the formal analysis, conceptualization, and methodology, and reviewed and edited the text. DW contributed to conceptualization and methodology, and reviewed and edited the text. MRL contributed to conceptualization and methodology, collected the data, acquired funding, and reviewed and edited the text.

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Abstract

Previous research suggests that bystanders of conflicts use a range of intervention strategies. Yet, much less is known about other actions – beyond intervention – that bystanders might engage in during conflicts. Further, while prior studies reveal that gender differences emerge in bystander behavior, few studies have assessed the ecological validity of such potential differences in bystander actions during real-life conflicts. Addressing this concern, we systematically observed the diverse bystander behaviors of individuals presenting as men and women in real-life public conflicts captured on CCTV. We observed 67 public conflicts in the inner city of Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Using a qualitative approach, we first identified the broad spectrum of actions that bystanders engaged in. We then ran linear probability models to examine the relationship between bystander's gender presentation and bystanders' engagement in seven bystander actions ($N = 1,959$), followed by a multimodel analysis to test the robustness of these findings. Results indicate that bystanders engaged in a diversity of actions, ranging from inattentive (i.e., glancing while moving) and reactive actions (e.g., laughing) to physical forms of intervention. Unexpectedly, women were *not* more likely to engage in affiliative forms of intervention (e.g., calming hand gestures, non-forceful touching, practical help). In addition to physical intervention, men were more likely to react to conflicts by laughing, filming, or cheering. The only type of action that was more typical among women than men was inattention (i.e., glancing while moving). Our results show that bystander behavior in public space is carried out in gendered ways, albeit in a less clear-cut manner than expected.

Introduction

Recent research suggests that bystander intervention is much more common than previously assumed, especially in contexts of violently dangerous events with victims in serious need of help (Lindegaard et al., 2022; Philpot et al., 2020). Studies relying on real-life conflicts captured on CCTV suggest that bystanders may engage in various acts of intervention (e.g., escalatory and de-escalatory, Liebst et al., 2019), and engage in a typical sequence of de-escalatory intervention (Ejbye-Ernst et al., 2022). Similarly, studies on bystander intervention in sexual violence relying on other data sources, such as vignettes and surveys, reveal that bystanders have a range of opportunities to intervene (Mainwaring et al., 2022; McMahan et al., 2013; Kaya et al., 2020; Labhardt et al., 2017). While these studies have provided insights into how bystanders intervene, much remains unknown about bystander behavior in conflicts more generally – including what bystanders do when they do not intervene. Bloch and colleagues (2018), who qualitatively analyzed CCTV footage of violent public incidents, found that bystanders are not merely passive, but engage in a variety of actions when witnessing conflicts, emphasizing the importance of understanding how bystanders behave in conflicts beyond intervention strategies.

While these previous studies on bystanders in real-life conflicts have rarely focused on gender in particular, a few studies suggest that *how* individuals perform bystander intervention tends to vary by gender. Video footage of real-life emergencies has revealed that individuals presenting as men were more likely to intervene physically in street fights (Liebst et al., 2019), whereas those presenting as women were more likely to engage in consolation behavior in the aftermath of robberies (Lindegaard et al., 2017). In the context of sexual violence, studies have found that women are overall more willing to intervene and do so by providing support to the victim, whereas men are more prone to direct and physical confrontation (Cook & Reynald, 2016; Mainwaring et al., 2022), suggesting that different intervention strategies may be applied. Although previous research suggests that men and women perform different roles as bystanders, a systematic analysis of the broad spectrum of actions that bystanders engage in – rather than a focus on their intervention rate – remains absent from the literature. Importantly, combining different types of bystander actions into a single measure of intervention may provide inaccurate results as gender differences in types of actions may cancel each other out (Mainwaring et al., 2022). Further, by focusing on bystander behavior in emergencies that is displayed in overt and strength-intensive ways, we risk overlooking forms of less overt bystander behavior that might not fit with such male-oriented types of intervention (e.g., consolation, see Lindegaard et al., 2017).

The current study aims to provide a more nuanced overview of bystander behaviors by investigating various bystander actions by individuals presenting as men and women, as observed in 67 public conflicts in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, recorded by CCTV. We describe bystanders' observed behaviors as they occur in real-life situations. Importantly, the chosen method of using real-life observations does *not* allow us to assess the meaning behind bystanders' engagement in these actions and involves the coding of individuals' visual appearance as part of one's display of gender to the outside world (e.g., clothing, hairstyle, movements), including categories of 'woman', 'man', and 'other'. That is, we here refer to individuals' displays of gender *presentations* – based on how individuals present themselves through cues in public space – rather than on individuals' self-identified gender. While the data used in the study does not enable us to consider individuals' gender identity, it does allow us to analyze in-detail *how* individuals may perform gender as a situated social practice through their helping behavior in real-life conflicts (West & Zimmerman, 1987). The analysis of CCTV footage offers the possibility to systematically and unobtrusively examine a diversity of bystander behaviors in real-life situations in public (see Bloch et al., 2018; Ejbye-Ernst et al., 2022a, 2022b; Liebst et al., 2019; Philpot et al., 2020). As such, we used both qualitative and quantitative methods to achieve two research goals: 1) to identify the broad spectrum of actions that bystanders of public conflicts engage in, and 2) to examine to what extent bystanders' gender presentations are associated with their enactment of these actions. By doing so, we gain a comprehensive insight into the diversity of bystander actions among bystanders presenting as men and women – knowledge that is pivotal for intervention efforts.

Bystander actions

A growing interdisciplinary body of evidence shows that bystanders can be helpful in the prevention and de-escalation of criminal behavior (Levine et al., 2011; Philpot et al., 2020; Reynald, 2011). Within the field of criminology, the deterrent effect is predominantly ascribed to the *mere presence* of informal guardians in the situation (e.g., residents). This follows from the routine activity theory stressing how the absence of capable guardians is one of the essential situational circumstances—in addition to the presence of a motivated offender and the availability of a suitable victim—needed for a crime to occur (Cohen & Felson, 1979). More recent research suggests that bystander guardians are not only helpful due to their mere presence but rather because of how they are *actively involved* in placating the events. In particular, this insight has been propelled by studies using video data to systematically observe bystander behavior in real-life violent events (Levine et al., 2011). For example, Philpot et al. (2020) analyzed CCTV

footage and found that in around nine out of ten violent public conflicts, at least one bystander, and typically several, intervened. Similarly, a study based on camera phone recordings of violent incidents in public urban spaces found bystander intervention in three out of four cases (Weenink et al., 2022).

While studies on conflicts in public space have focused on the likelihood and types of intervention (e.g., Ejbye-Ernst et al., 2022a; Liebst et al., 2019), much remains unknown about what bystanders do when they do *not* intervene. Yet, a qualitative analysis of CCTV footage of violent public incidents by Bloch and colleagues (2018) reveals that bystanders are not merely passive, and engage in a variety of actions, including distancing (e.g., ignoring), ambivalence (e.g., fidgeting), and involvement (e.g., practical). Essentially, individuals are constantly engaged in actions, and are always doing something or *trying* to do something (Becker, 2004). Based on these findings, Bloch et al. (2018) argued for the reassessment and broadening of previously defined categories. Similarly, in distressed and violent neighborhoods, Wilkinson (2007) found diverse non-intervention behaviors, such as watching, ignoring the conflict, or running away. Alternatively, bystanders have been found to facilitate reconciliation (Philpot et al., 2022), to act escalatory in addition to de-escalatory (Liebst et al., 2019), and to provide consolation in the aftermath of conflicts (Lindegaard et al., 2017), suggesting that there is a diversity of actions available to bystanders. Additional insights on the diversity of actions available to bystanders stem from the field of sexual violence (for recent reviews, see e.g., Mainwaring et al., 2022; Park & Kim, 2023), indicating that a variety of intervention opportunities are available to bystanders, such as direct intervention (e.g., addressing a perpetrator) and indirect intervention (e.g., distract, delegate) (Kaya et al., 2020; McMahan et al., 2013).

Gender and bystander behavior

There is a large body of research on gender and bystander intervention, particularly focused on sexual violence (e.g., Banyard, 2011; Mainwaring et al., 2022; McMahan et al., 2013) and intimate partner violence (IPV) (e.g., Banyard et al., 2020; Bennett et al., 2017). This literature has revealed gender differences in the type of contexts in which individuals intervene as well as in the type of intervention they tend to engage in, with women being more willing to intervene in sexual violence and IPV and to do so by engaging in indirect and/or nurturing forms of intervention (e.g., contacting police, providing emotional support), whereas men are more prone to use direct and physical confrontation when they intervene (Banyard et al., 2020; Bennett et al., 2017; Berkowitz et al., 2022; Casper et al., 2021; Cook & Reynald, 2016; Katz & Nguyen, 2016; Mainwaring et al., 2022). While these studies focus on a specific

context, they nevertheless underscore the variety and gendered nature of bystander intervention in potentially dangerous situations that we might be able to extrapolate from to understand situations that do not explicitly involve sexual violence or IPV. Indeed, observational research of real-life emergencies gives reason to believe that there might also be gender differences in bystander intervention in other violent situations. Particularly, studies suggest that women are more likely to engage in consolatory behavior in the aftermath of robberies (Lindegaard et al., 2017), whereas men were more likely to intervene physically in street fights (Liebst et al., 2019).

Previous studies have often explained such variation in the behavior of women and men from the social role theory (Eagly, 2009; Eagly & Crowley, 1986), attributing differences in helping to gender role expectations enforced by society. From this perspective, the kind of help that individuals provide is determined by the extent to which this behavior fits the gender role they aspire towards, and those roles consist of a set of societal and cultural norms about how individuals should behave based on their identification, with masculinity typically being associated with agency (i.e., being assertive and independent) and femininity with communion (i.e., caring and nurturing helping) (Dovidio & Penner, 2004). Importantly, however, individuals do not inherit a masculine or feminine role, but, instead, actively shape and reshape what it means to become men or women through their daily interactions with others (Kimmel, 2000). As argued by West and Zimmerman (1987), individuals “do gender” in their interactions with others who may evaluate them by performing activities or exhibiting traits prescribed to them, and may actively construct and express their gender identity in their interactions through their performance. In doing so, individuals may conform to – as well as challenge or resist – gender role expectations through their bystander behavior. By engaging in bystander behavior that is perceived to be an appropriate form of feminine (e.g., caring and nurturing behaviors; Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Prentice & Carranza, 2002) or masculine behavior (e.g., physical and/or confrontational behaviors; Bosson & Vandello, 2011; Vandello & Bosson, 2013) individuals may “do gender” through their everyday interactions and behaviors, thereby shaping and reinforcing gender expectations. As such, individuals who present as women may, for example, engage in affiliative forms of bystander intervention, such as touching (Lindegaard et al., 2017), as this tends to be perceived as a more appropriate form of social interaction for women (Suvilehto et al., 2015), whereas individuals who present as men may perform physical intervention behaviors in particular (Liebst et al., 2019).

Note that, when coding bystanders as ‘man’, ‘woman’, or ‘other’ in this study, we refer to individuals’ gender *presentation* – based on how individuals present themselves in

public space – rather than on individuals' self-identified gender. While the data used in the study precludes the possibility to consider individuals' gender identity, it does allow us to analyze in-detail variation in how individuals engage in actual helping behavior and the potential association with the way they perform gender.

Current study

Prior work suggests that bystanders in violent conflicts engage in a variety of behaviors and that these behaviors may differ based on how bystanders perform gender. Still, few works have paid attention to actions that bystanders engage in when they do not intervene.

Insights from real-life observations can be particularly useful to fill this gap as previous research on bystander intervention has predominantly relied on vignette designs, which may capture what individuals *say* they would do rather than accurately depicting their actions in these situations (Baumeister et al., 2007; Eifler, 2007; Jerolmack & Khan, 2014). While a few studies relying on CCTV footage have included gender presentation when examining bystander intervention (Liebst et al., 2019; Lindegaard et al., 2017), the *diversity* of bystander behaviors beyond intervention has not yet been analyzed with consideration of gender presentation.

In the current study, we use CCTV footage to additionally shed light on actions *beyond* intervention in real-life situations, with particular attention to whether and how these actions are performed differently across gender presentations. Importantly, vignette studies tend to find greater differences between men and women in bystander intervention than studies relying on real-life situations, resulting in a need to rely on real-life data to complement and enrich our understanding of bystander intervention (Mainwaring et al., 2022). Based on previous research suggesting that bystander behavior is performed in gendered ways, we hypothesize the following:

- H1: Women are more likely than men to engage in affiliative bystander actions during public conflicts.
- H2: Men are more likely than women to engage in non-physical aggressive bystander actions during public conflicts.
- H3: Men are more likely than women to engage in physical non-aggressive bystander actions during public conflicts.
- H4: Men are more likely than women to engage in physical aggressive bystander actions during public conflicts.

While these intervention behaviors were identified and hypothesized based on previous literature prior to our coding process, we also inductively identified a range of actions *beyond* intervention in our qualitative phase. Since these actions, which consist of inattentive, attentive and reactive actions, were identified after the data were collected – and were not foreseeable given the absence of prior literature on these actions –, we did not make any predictions with regards to these actions. Instead, we inductively explore their associations with bystanders' gender presentation. We elaborate on these actions and our coding process in the Data and Methods section below.

Data and methods

The data consist of CCTV footage of real-life interpersonal conflicts in public space in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, recorded in the period from April to August 2017 (data, Stata script and ethogram are available as supplementary material at tinyurl.com/e2rt1e). The video footage used in the current study was sourced from a pool of videos that were partially included in prior studies with other research purposes, including Ejbye-Ernst (2023), Ejbye-Ernst et al. (2022a, 2022b), Lindegaard et al. (2022) and Philpot et al. (2020). This pool of videos – the source data – consists of hundreds of raw videos reflecting conflict situations. These videos consist of the original CCTV material as provided by the municipality, and they do not have any assigned codes or measures. While some clips from the source data (i.e., raw videos) have been included in previous studies, the coded data (i.e., coded observations of these videos) used in our study are unique, resulting in novel measures, analyses, and conclusions.

We conceptualized a conflict as a disagreement between at least two people in which at least one individual showed signs of non-verbal aggression (e.g., aggressive gesturing, pushing). The timing of the conflicts was noted down by municipal employees, and the footage was then saved by the Amsterdam police for the purpose of the study. The municipal employees usually only note down potentially criminal offenses, but to study conflicts in which bystanders might prevent escalation, we instructed them to also include low-level incidents (e.g., agitated gesturing). Amsterdam has about 300 CCTV cameras placed in locations involving disturbances of public order, such as nightlife areas, drug dealing areas, youth hang-out spots, shopping areas, and tourist areas. Data access was granted by the Netherlands Public Prosecution Service under strict privacy and security regulations. The study was positively evaluated by the Ethics Review Board of the University of Amsterdam.

Video clips were included if they met the following criteria. (1) The footage must contain an observed conflict between at least two individuals, excluding videos with no conflicts or depicting other incidents. (2) There must be bystanders present who were aware, or had the potential to be aware, of the conflict, identified through their attentiveness to the conflict, such as their movements, face and body directions, and/or staring (Bloch et al., 2018; Philpot et al., 2020). Individuals were also considered bystanders if they walked through the middle of the conflict, changed course to avoid the conflict, or were closer than others who noticed the conflict (Philpot et al., 2020). (3) No police or paramedics were present when the conflict started (Bloch et al., 2018; Philpot et al., 2020). If police or paramedics arrived during or after the conflict, the video was included in the final sample, but bystander behaviors were only analyzed until the arrival of these officials, as the mere presence of formal guardians could affect informal bystander behavior. (4) The video had to be of sufficient technical quality to allow for the detailed analysis of individual behaviors. (5) The video must show the sequence of the conflict without substantial breaks.

In total, 120 videos were collected that depicted an interpersonal conflict. Of this sample, 27 videos did not have sufficient technical quality to allow for detailed analysis (e.g., grainy footage), and 16 videos did not show the full action sequence. In addition, in 4 videos there were no bystanders present or they were not (clearly) aware of the conflict, and in 16 videos, police or paramedics were present when the conflict started (these categories are not mutually exclusive). The exclusion of these videos resulted in a final sample of 67 videos of conflicts containing $N = 1,959$ bystanders.

We conducted an a priori power analysis in G*Power as a planning tool to design our study, suggesting that, when using a two-sample t -test, a sample of 1,302 individuals would be able to detect a small effect ($f^2 = 0.2$), with a power of 95%, and an alpha value of .05. The power analysis can be replicated by entering these details into G*Power. An overview of the analysis can be found in our supplementary material. We coded beyond the required number of observations and used all videos that met the inclusion criteria, because resources allowed us to do so, and a larger sample size increases accuracy. Note that the initial power analysis was conducted years prior to the current study, and after the data were collected we eventually opted for an alternative way to analyze our data, consisting of a regression approach over the initially planned t -test. As our regression models, specified with cluster-robust standard errors and run as multilevel models, can be more demanding in terms of power, we additionally conducted a sensitivity power analysis based on the effective sample size (which accounts for the design effect of analyzing clustered data, see Snijders & Bosker, 2011) after our data were collected. The subsequent sensitivity

power analysis confirmed our sample's ability to identify small effects for all analyses conducted. Additionally, our sample size is in line with the recommendation of McNeish and Stapleton (2016) for obtaining accurate point estimates.

Coding process

The unit of analysis consisted of individuals ($N = 1,957$ bystanders) who were nested in 67 conflict situations. Individuals could engage in multiple actions throughout the conflict, which can be seen as properties of these individuals. The coding process started with an extensive qualitative phase, in which a catalogue of bystander actions was developed into an ethogram (see Appendix A), which was then used for inter-coder reliability testing. After establishing sufficient inter-coder reliability, the ethogram was applied to the CCTV footage in Behavioral Observation Research Interactive Software (BORIS) by the first author. The coded data were transported and analyzed in STATA version 16.

Qualitative phase

The coding started with a qualitative, inductive phase, in which a subsample of the footage was watched and analyzed repeatedly. To gain a deeper understanding of bystander actions, 10 videos (15%) were randomly selected and transcribed in detail. Prior to start of the inductive phase, we made the decision to qualitatively code a *minimum* of 10 videos (15%) but to let the final number of videos depend on saturation. This was deemed a manageable portion given the labor-intensive nature of coding every action of each bystander involved in the conflict. As saturation was indeed achieved within these initial 10 videos, we concluded that coding additional videos would not yield new insights. Note that, prior to the qualitative phase, all available videos had been extensively reviewed for sample selection, resulting in a good familiarity with the material before the inductive phase commenced.

The transcripts of the 10 videos were subject to an inductive analysis to identify emerging themes in bystander actions. After an open-ended coding of the transcripts, the themes and categories (e.g., 'entertainment') were collapsed, narrowed down, and merged into specific codes (e.g., 'laughing') to create an 'ethogram' (or behavior inventory), which entails a detailed description of behavioral codes (see tinyurl.com/e2rt1e or Appendix A for full ethogram).

Inter-coder reliability

To test the reliability of the ethogram before coding, we randomly selected 9 videos (12% of the total sample) for double coding. These videos were distinct from the videos subjected to qualitative coding and from the videos used for training of the

second coder. The first author used segments of 5 random videos to train the second coder (a postdoc researcher experienced in video analysis). In the 9 videos used to assess the inter-coder reliability, 153 bystanders were independently double-coded, including 116 bystanders presenting as men and 37 bystanders presenting as women. To ensure consistent coding, each individual was given a unique identification number, accompanied by a detailed description of the clothing and location of the bystander. The start time of the conflict was identified by the first author and shared with the second coder, meaning that both coders started coding at approximately the same time. This approach was chosen to limit bias due to unitization (Campbell et al., 2013). In our data, the units of analysis (i.e., conflicts) are not provided naturally but require subjective interpretation. To prevent a situation in which the two coders unitized the footage differently, which could lead to the coding of different segments or different bystanders of the same footage, we deemed it necessary to identify the meaningful unit (i.e., the start of the conflict) beforehand (see e.g., Campbell et al. (2013) for more information about bias due to unitization in qualitative data).

We assessed inter-coder reliability with the Krippendorff's alpha (α ; Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007) by calculating whether both coders identified the *same type of action* by the *same individual*, and calculated the score for coders' observations of bystander's gender presentation. The inter-coder reliability alpha values were determined per action category, being affiliative intervention ($\alpha = 1.00$), non-physical aggressive intervention ($\alpha = .43$), physical non-aggressive intervention ($\alpha = .93$), physical aggressive intervention ($\alpha = 1.00$), attentive action ($\alpha = .71$), inattentive action ($\alpha = .81$), and reactive action ($\alpha = .72$). Most variables exceeded the threshold for sufficient inter-coder reliability of ($\alpha = .67$) (de Swert, 2012; Krippendorff, 2004), except for 'non-physical aggressive intervention', which was nevertheless included because consensus could be reached for all discrepancies after discussion. The measure of gender reached a Krippendorff's alpha value of $\alpha = 1.00$, indicating perfect agreement.

For bystanders' *intervention* actions, we used operationalizations of actions that have been developed in the literature, such as 'pushing' or 'hitting' (e.g., Bloch et al., 2018; Philpot et al., 2020; Ejbye-Ernst et al., 2022b). Yet, for other bystander actions during the conflict (i.e., that did *not* consist of intervention) there were no existing operationalizations available, so we relied on our qualitative, inductive analysis of the videos. Examples of actions beyond intervention that were identified include individuals who were glancing, stopping to watch the conflict, moving closer, filming, and laughing. Detailed descriptions are available in the ethogram in the supplementary material.

In total, we identified 20 non-verbal bystander actions (e.g., ‘pushing,’ ‘filming’) in the qualitative phase. Instead of analyzing bystanders’ engagement in each of these actions separately, we collapsed the actions into broader categories, insofar that they were interpreted to serve the same socially meaningful purpose (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 2017). For example, the single behaviors ‘close proximity,’ ‘moving closer,’ ‘stopping to watch’ were collapsed into their socially meaningful denominator: bystanders who were *attentive* to the situation. As such, we combined the 20 codes into seven broader types of bystander actions that individuals could engage in.

Independent variable

The independent variable was the bystander’s gender presentation, which was coded as a dichotomous measure (0 = man; 1 = woman). Prior to coding the footage, the bystanders in the videos were identified and described, and were assigned as presenting as ‘man,’ ‘woman,’ or ‘other’. Note that we initially left open the possibility to code individuals as ‘other’, but both during the double coding for the inter-coder reliability as well as the actual coding this code was not assigned, so we eventually created a dichotomous measure of ‘man’ or ‘woman’. The observer’s perception of gender presentation was based on clothing, hairstyle, movements, and posturing. As mentioned, we reached a perfect inter-coder reliability score on our observations of gender presentation, and we did not have to discard any bystanders or videos due to inability to assign their gender presentation based on our observations. Note that this does not tell us whether our interpretation of individuals’ gender presentation in public space aligns with individuals’ self-identified gender.

Dependent variables

The dependent variables were binary estimates that expressed whether individual bystanders engaged in specific actions over the course of a conflict (0 = individual did not display action; 1 = individual displayed action). We identified seven categories of bystander actions in the qualitative phase of the study, which can be divided into four intervention actions and three non-intervention actions.

The four identified types of intervention were: Affiliative, non-physical aggressive, physical non-aggressive, and physical aggressive intervention. *Affiliative intervention* included bystanders who engage in calming/open hand gestures, non-forceful touching, or practical help. *Non-physical aggressive intervention* included bystanders who engaged in fast, expressive and aggressive hand movements, typically pointing at someone in a threatening manner. *Physical non-aggressive intervention* included bystanders who were blocking contact between conflict parties, holding a person back, hauling a person off, or pushing conflict parties apart. *Physical aggressive*

intervention included bystanders who were throwing, shoving, hitting or kicking a conflict party, or using violence against a person on the ground.

The three types of non-intervention included attentive action, inattentive action, and reactive action. *Attentive action* included bystanders who stop moving or slow down to watch the conflict, move closer to the conflict, or remain in close proximity to one of the conflict parties. *Inattentive action* included bystanders who glance at the conflict while moving (e.g., walking or cycling)—i.e., the bystanders do not stop moving and are not slowing down to watch the conflict or get involved but continue their way. *Reactive action* included bystanders who were laughing at the conflict, filming the conflict parties, or cheering them on.

Control variables

In the multimodel analysis, we control for several factors that may affect the likelihood of bystander intervention. *Duration of the conflict*, measured as a continuous variable, was included because the time a conflict lasts may provide bystanders with more or less exposure to the conflict. Note that a few conflicts lasted so long that they could be considered outliers, and these values were winsorized to the outer fence (i.e., three times the interquartile range of the variable). *Severity of the conflict* was included since bystanders are generally more likely to intervene in dangerous situations compared to situations that present low potential danger for the victim (Lindegaard et al., 2022; Weenink et al., 2022). We created dummy variables for three levels of severity, consisting of low severity, medium severity, and high severity (Lindegaard et al., 2022). Low severity consisted of non-violent aggressive actions that penetrate the opponent's intimate space. Medium severity consisted of physically aggressive actions, consisting of, for example, isolated hits, slaps, punches. High severity consisted of physically aggressive actions to a person on their knees or lying on the ground perpetrated by a person that is standing. If conflict parties engaged in multiple levels of severity, the severity value was based on the action with the highest level of severity. We acknowledge that this measure of severity is not ideal, as levels of severity are not fixed in conflicts and bystanders within the same conflict may encounter different levels of severity. Yet, given the labor-intensive and detailed coding of all individual bystanders, it was not feasible to distinguish levels of severity related to specific bystander actions. We also controlled for the *total number of bystanders present* during the conflict, which included all bystanders who were identified as being aware of the conflict. Additionally, we included the *number of intervening bystanders* in a conflict, as intervention by others may affect individual actions. More specifically, there may be saturation of help once one or more bystanders engage in intervention. This count consisted of all bystanders who intervened in the conflict. Further, *gender composition of bystanders* was included as

a control variable, coded as a dichotomous measure, consisting of ‘mixed-gender’ or ‘men only’ (there were no ‘women only’ groups in the data). This variable was included because the gender composition of the group may be relevant, as women’s likelihood to intervene may be reduced when they find themselves in male-dominated groups (Levine & Crowther, 2008), whereas male-dominated groups may increase men’s performances of masculinity and group cohesion (Messerschmidt, 1993; Rosen et al., 2003). Last, *gender of first intervener* was also included as a control variable, for which we created dummy codes for ‘man’, ‘woman’, or ‘none’ if intervention was absent.

Analytic plan

We used univariate linear probability models to examine the association between bystander’s gender and bystander’s engagement in seven types of bystander action (i.e., display of affiliative, non-physical aggressive, physical non-aggressive, physical aggressive, attentive, inattentive, and reactive actions). Linear probability models offer an appropriate approach to model binary outcomes, with the advantage of yielding readily understandable results (Angrist & Pischke, 2009; Jaccard & Brinberg, 2021). These models were specified with cluster-robust standard errors to account for the hierarchical data structure (i.e., bystanders nested in conflicts), which violates the regression assumption of independency of observations (Cameron & Miller, 2015). Since we run the association between gender and the outcome actions in seven separate tests, a multiple comparisons problem arises. We accounted for this by Bonferroni correcting our alpha threshold to $0.05/7 = .007$ (Bland & Altman, 1995).

In addition to confirmatory tests of the four hypotheses and the exploratory tests of inattentive, attentive, and reactive bystander actions, we conducted sensitivity analyses to assess the robustness of our results across all plausible data and model specifications (Steege et al., 2016). This procedure – sometimes referred to as a ‘multimodel’ analysis – is a means to avoid selective reporting of false positives and to increase transparency (Rijnhart et al., 2021; Steege et al., 2016). After all, a reported model is only one of many plausible models that could have been estimated based on our data, and decisions for a specific model are often arbitrary (Gelman & Loken, 2013). By performing all possible analyses across the data, a multimodel analysis offers insight into the extent to which the conclusions change as a result of these arbitrary choices, and indicates to what degree these choices contribute to the fragility of the results (Steege et al., 2016). In the current study, we used a multimodel analysis to evaluate the robustness of gender as a predictor of the outcome variables across all combinations of six control variables, estimated with logit, probit, and linear probability models, resulting in 192 unique model specifications for each of the seven outcome variables. We interpreted a significance rate of 50%—meaning that half of the plausible models have a statistically significant estimate

in the same direction—as the lower threshold for weak robustness and a significance rate of 95% as an indicator of very strong robustness (Young & Holsteen, 2017). Since a multimodel analysis also mitigates multiple comparisons problems (Steege et al., 2016), we evaluated the predictive robustness using a Bonferroni corrected (.007) alongside a traditional 5% alpha level.

Results

The data included 67 conflicts, lasting around three minutes on average ($M = 168.6$ seconds, $Min = 14$, $Max = 2,389$). The incidents were classified more often as having a low (48%) or medium (46%) severity than as having a high severity (6%). The conflict parties were most often man versus man (79%), compared to cases of man versus woman (19%) and the rare event of woman versus woman (only 1 conflict; 2%). Across the conflicts, we observed 1,959 bystanders, of which 1,365 presented as men and 584 as women. The included conflicts had between 4 and 116 and an average of 52.7 bystanders present. The intervention rate was higher among men, with 13.7% of men intervening compared to 8.0% of the women, $t(1957) = 3.5$, $p < .001$. Appendix B gives an overview of bystanders' actions and their frequencies, with bystanders most often engaging in attentive and inattentive actions. The descriptive statistics for all bystander actions, including the gender distribution, are presented in Table 1.

Table . Descriptive Statistics of Bystander Actions

	All bystanders ($n = 1,959$)		Men ($n = 1,375$)		Women ($n = 584$)	
	N	M/%	N	M/%	N	M/%
Intervention Behaviors						
Affiliative	152	7.8%	123	9.0%	29	5.0%
Non-Physical Aggressive	47	2.4%	33	2.4%	14	2.4%
Physical Non-Aggressive	180	9.2%	149	10.8%	31	5.3%
Physical Aggressive	194	9.9%	158	11.5%	36	6.2%
Non-Intervention Behaviors						
Attentive	1361	69.5%	994	72.3%	367	62.8%
Inattentive	959	49.0%	635	46.2%	324	55.5%
Reactive	178	9.1%	145	10.6%	33	5.7%

Note. The percentages indicate the number of (men or women) bystanders out of all bystanders that displayed the behavior. Note that these behaviors are *not* mutually exclusive, as bystanders could engage in multiple actions. As such, the frequencies of the behaviors exceed the total number of bystanders. In Appendix B, we display the frequencies of the 20 specific actions (e.g., practical help) *within* these seven overarching categories (e.g., affiliative intervention).

Figure 1 presents the regression results. The result of the multimodel analysis is summarized in Table 2. The percentages in Table 2 represent the proportion of models where gender had a statistically significant association with each of the seven action outcomes. From Table 2 it is immediately noteworthy that the result hinges on the alpha level used: While all outcomes demonstrate a robust association when evaluated with a traditional 5% alpha level, the result was more mixed when evaluated against its Bonferroni corrected (and conservative) counterpart. For each of the seven outcome variables, we will present the results of the linear probability model as well as the results of the multimodel analysis indicating the robustness of our findings.

In contrast to Hypothesis 1, we did not find evidence that women were more likely to provide affiliative intervention than men. The association between gender and affiliative intervention was not significant. While Table 2 shows that, based on a traditional alpha level, affiliative actions were more often displayed by men (86% of the models indicated that direction), none of these significant findings held up after the Bonferroni correction was applied. As such, the effect showed a notable level of fragility.

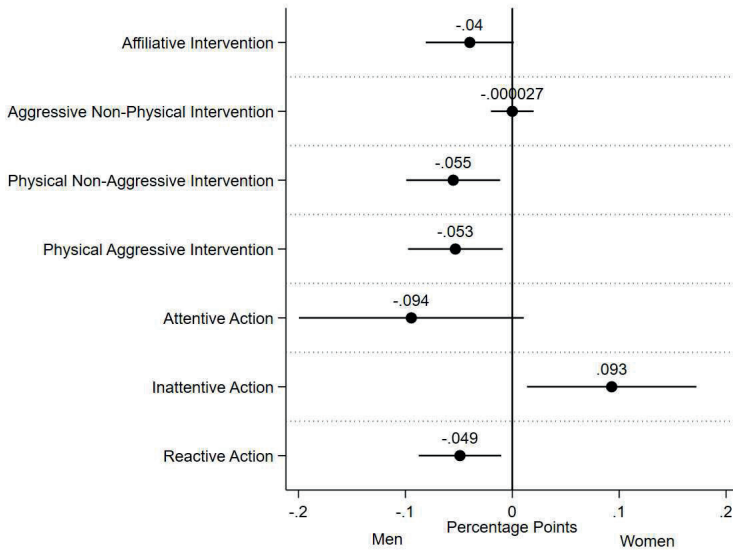


Figure 1. Univariate Linear Probability Models Regressing Actions on Gender (0 = Man, 1 = Woman)

Note. Lines are Bonferroni corrected confidence intervals and dots are point estimates of the coefficients with their value noted above. Coefficients in the linear probability model represent the predicted probability that the outcome is present (i.e., the action occurs). Negative coefficients indicate a higher likelihood among men, whereas positive coefficients indicate a higher likelihood among women. Confidence intervals that include 0 (evidenced by the vertical center line) indicate insignificant results.

Table 2. Multimodel Analysis of the Association between Each of the Seven Outcomes and Gender

	$\alpha = .05$	Bonferroni corrected $\alpha = .007$
Affiliative	86% sig. and neg.	0% sig. and neg.
Non-Physical Aggressive	0% sig. and pos.	0% sig. and pos.
Physical Non-Aggressive	100% sig. and neg.	64% sig. and neg.
Physical Aggressive	100% sig. and neg.	47% sig. and neg.
Attentive	100% sig. and neg.	2% sig. and neg.
Inattentive	100% sig. and pos.	54% sig. and pos.
Reactive	100% sig. and neg.	82% sig. and neg.

Note. The percentage figures represent the proportion of the 192 models run for each of the outcomes that showed a statistically significant gender difference at the given alpha level and had a stable estimate in either a positive or negative direction.

Next, in contrast to Hypothesis 2, the results indicate that men were *not* found to be more likely to engage in non-physical aggressive intervention than women. Table 2 shows that none of the estimated models established a significant association between gender and engagement in non-physical aggressive intervention acts. A significant association was additionally not found when applying traditional alpha levels.

Consistent with Hypothesis 3, men were significantly more likely than women to engage in physical non-aggressive intervention. As visualized in Figure 1, men were around 5 percentage points (i.e., 0.05×100) more likely than women to engage in these actions. The predicted probabilities of physical non-aggressive intervention for women and men were 5.3 and 10.8, respectively. Regarding the robustness of this association, Table 2 shows that, after applying the Bonferroni correction, 64% of the estimated models indicated a significant association between gender and engagement in physical non-aggressive intervention actions, suggesting a moderate robustness.

In line with Hypothesis 4, men were more likely than women to engage in physical aggressive intervention. The related predicted probabilities for men were 11.5 and for women 6.2, meaning men had around 5 percentage points higher likelihood of engaging in this type of intervention (see Figure 1). Table 2 shows that, after applying the Bonferroni correction, 47% of the estimated models indicated a significant association between gender and engagement in physical non-aggressive intervention actions. Thus, the established gender difference in physical aggressive behavior appears to be less robust than the established gender difference in physical non-aggressive behavior.

For the non-intervention actions (i.e., attentive, inattentive, and reactive), we did not have any expectations regarding the associations with gender, as these measures were inductively identified during our qualitative phase. We found that there was no significant association between gender and attentive actions (e.g., stopping or slowing down to watch the conflict). Table 2 shows that, after applying the Bonferroni correction, the established gender differences did not hold up in most of the estimated models (only in 2% of the models).

Women were found to be significantly more likely to engage in inattentive actions (e.g., glancing at the conflict while moving), although the wide confidence interval indicates an imprecise estimate. Women were over nine percentage points more likely to display inattentive action (see Figure 1), with predicted probabilities of 55.5 for women, and 46.2 for men. This was the only action within the data that was more often performed by women. Regarding the robustness of this association, Table 2 shows that, after applying the Bonferroni correction, the association between gender and inattentive actions held up in 54% of the models, which is considered moderately robust.

Finally, we found that there was a significant association between gender and reactive actions (e.g., cheering, filming, or laughing about the conflict). Reactive actions were around five percentage points more likely to be performed by men than women (see Figure 1), with predicted probabilities of 10.5 for men and 5.7 for women. As evidenced by Table 2, reactive actions demonstrated the highest level of robustness, with a significance rate of 82% when evaluated against the Bonferroni corrected alpha level.

Discussion

By using the novel methodology of video analysis, the current study provides insight into bystander behavior in real-life public conflicts. The purpose of our study was twofold. First, by analyzing the broad spectrum of bystander actions, we provide new insights that inform us *how* bystanders behave in conflicts in public space beyond intervention. Second, we examined to what extent bystanders' gender presentation was associated with the enactment of these actions.

Regarding our first research goal, our findings, consistent with previous work by Bloch and colleagues (2018), indicate that bystanders engage in a broad spectrum of actions. Acknowledging individuals' constant engagement in some form of action

(Becker, 2004), we identified various actions beyond intervention, such as attentive actions (i.e., watching, moving closer, standing in close proximity), inattentive actions (i.e., glancing while moving), and reactive actions (i.e., cheering, filming, laughing). Notably, these actions are not mutually exclusive, and bystanders often engaged in multiple actions. Even when bystanders did not intervene, almost 70% of all bystanders engaged in attentive actions, and were observant of the conflict. While we also identified acts of inattention and reactive acts, attentive actions were the most common form of non-intervention. Importantly, the strength of our dataset—enabling us to observe real life behavior in real life situations—also holds the limitation that we cannot account for individuals' interpretations and thoughts. Future research should analyze the meaning of the diversity and sequence of bystander behavior, recognizing the influence of social interactional processes on the meaning that individuals assign to situations (Blumer, 1986).

As bystanders often engaged in multiple actions, we believe that future research would benefit from incorporating broader categories of bystander behaviors. Further, the variety of actions that bystanders engage in may provide a behavioral toolbox for *how* bystanders can intervene. Policy makers could potentially use this toolbox to create greater awareness in terms of how individuals can act when they encounter a conflict in public, as knowledge regarding the diversity of roles that bystanders take on – including actions that individuals might not even perceive as an act of intervention, such as practical help or touching a victim – can have an empowering effect and increase bystanders' self-efficacy.

Our second research goal was to examine to what extent bystanders' gender presentation was associated with the enactment of these bystander actions. While caring prosocial behavior may represent a feminine form of intervention that individuals may use to “do gender” and social touching being considered more appropriate for women (Suvilehto et al., 2015), women were *not* more than men likely to provide affiliation to conflict parties. Men, intervening more often in general, may adapt their intervention strategies to the situation they encounter. Unfortunately, it was not feasible to consider the social relationship between bystanders and conflict parties due to the labor-intensive nature of the coding. Previous research indicates a higher likelihood of intervention among bystanders with a prior social relationship to a conflict party compared to strangers (Liebst et al., 2019). Affiliative intervention may, as such, be driven by male friends affiliating with conflict parties in our sample – in which most bystanders and conflict parties presented as men – as touching is typically more common and more accepted among close friends compared to strangers (Heslin et al., 1983; Suvilehto et al., 2015). Future research could incorporate

social relationships to better understand how such social dynamics may influence *how* bystanders act during conflicts.

Further, both types of physical intervention—physical non-aggressive intervention and physical aggressive intervention—were more likely to be performed by men than women. This is consistent with earlier work that found that bystanders presenting as men were more likely to engage in both escalatory and de-escalatory types of physical intervention in street fights (Liebst et al., 2019). By engaging in physical acts of intervention – particularly directed to other men in front of an audience consisting of mostly men – bystanders conform to gender expectations that emphasize physical strength in helping behavior and thereby reinforce such expectations (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Importantly, these results do not imply that individuals presenting as women are more passive in their bystander behavior, as these behaviors are known to be context-specific. There are many ways to intervene in public conflicts, and indirect forms of intervention can also be helpful (e.g., distraction, Ejbye-Ernst et al., 2022a; aftermath consolation, Lindegaard et al., 2017) rather than, or in addition to, physical confrontation. Bystander intervention programs could potentially provide individuals with a variety of tailored intervention tools that they feel comfortable applying in different settings.

The vast majority of conflict situations involved men conflict parties (79.1%), which is not surprising, as violence in the public sphere is predominantly perpetrated by men against men (Mooney, 2018). These gender dynamics may affect the perceptions of bystanders, as prior studies indicate that individuals construct violence between men as more serious and natural, whereas violence between women is perceived as less serious and ineffectual (Cobbina et al., 2010; Hollander, 2001). Further, in terms of violence between men and women, men's violence against women is more often seen as unacceptable while women's violence against men is perceived as less threatening due to women's perceived vulnerability (Carlson, 2008; Hollander, 2001). The gender composition of conflict parties is therefore important to consider, but was beyond the scope of this study. Yet, in a separate paper, we found no significant differences in intervention likelihood across conflict party gender compositions nor interaction effects of bystanders' gender as a moderator (Van Baak et al., 2024), suggesting that such differences across gender compositions may not be as prevalent in real-life conflicts occurring in public space as one would expect based on previous research.

More generally, conflicts in public space tend to be a gendered phenomenon, occurring predominantly between men and witnessed mainly by male bystanders, particularly in nightlife settings. Men in male-only peer groups have been found to

show more expressions of hypermasculinity (i.e., exaggerated forms of masculinity) compared to those in mixed-gender groups and typically have higher levels of group cohesion (Messerschmidt, 1993; Rosen et al., 2003), which may encourage men to perform actions that fit notions of masculinity. In contrast, women's likelihood of intervention is reduced in male-dominated groups (Levine & Crowther, 2008). The current study sheds light on the individual likelihood of intervention among men and women, and controls for the gender composition of bystanders and first intervener's perceived gender, but it does not take these interactional processes into account. As intervention is typically performed in collaboration with others and often requires coordinated actions by several individuals to de-escalate the conflict (Bloch et al., 2018; Levine et al., 2011; Pallante et al., 2022; Weenink et al., 2022), future research should unpack the interactional processes in which these intervention behaviors in public conflicts occur.

Further, we explored the association between gender and non-intervention behaviors, including attentive, inattentive, and reactive actions. There were no significant gender differences in the performance of attentive actions. Inattentive action, consisting of quickly glancing at the conflict while moving, was the only action more likely to be performed by women. It has been acknowledged that navigating oneself in public is a different proposition for women, who have to navigate unwanted forms of communication with gender-typed expectations of kindness, and, as such, tend to be more likely to engage in avoidance behavior in public (Gardner, 1989; May et al., 2010; West, 1996). As such, women might be more likely to engage in what Goffman (1963) referred to as 'civil inattention' for the purpose of personal safety, which deserves further elaboration in future studies.

Lastly, we found a particularly clear association between bystander's gender presentation and reactive actions. Reactive actions, consisting of cheering the conflict parties on, laughing, and filming the conflict, were more likely to be performed by men. In this context, aggression might be perceived as an acceptable and potentially entertaining form of interaction, whereby men are able to perform or demonstrate their masculinity to prove their manhood to their peers, and strengthen their social relationships and feelings of belonging to a shared group (Bosson & Vandello, 2011; Vandello & Bosson, 2013; Short & Strodtbeck, 1965). By engaging in laughter, men may use and express humor as a part of their gender performances, which may make them feel connected to their peers (Kehily & Nayak, 1997). Future studies need to quantify these group dynamics to establish their effect on bystander actions. In the current study, 'filming' with a cell phone tended to occur in conjunction with laughing and/or cheering, and was therefore categorized as a reactive action. While cell phones

may also be used by bystanders to contact first responders, our observations did not indicate that this was the case. For example, we did not observe cues that bystanders were making calls or were looking around to identify their location. Filming could also function to preserve evidence for prosecution in case the police get involved. While we acknowledge this could be a form of intervention, it does not align with the definition of intervention behavior we maintained for the current study, because it includes help in the aftermath of the conflict. Our study was not developed or able to address actions that occur in the aftermath of the conflict. Yet, it would be interesting for future research to delve deeper into the bystanders' utilization of cell phones throughout and following conflicts. This includes not only exploring the immediate actions taken with the recorded material but also delving into the subsequent behaviors or implications of such recordings in broader social contexts.

Despite the detailed insights video surveillance footage provides into real-life conflicts, the applied method has several shortcomings. The footage, by its nature, lacks insights into the thoughts and feelings of bystanders, preventing explanations of their cognitive processes, including their willingness to intervene or their motives for refraining from intervention. This also means we do not know how the observed individuals self-identify internally in terms of gender. We focused on bystanders' gender presentation in public space, which is based on how individuals present themselves in everyday social interactions in a specific setting. Our distinction between 'men' and 'women' does not do justice to gender self-identification (Miller, 2002; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Further, we identified the actions that individuals presenting as men and women engaged in based on visual behaviors, but it is beyond the scope of the data to explain what *causes* such bystander behaviors during conflicts.

Relatedly, our findings can provide insight into only one specific situational and social context, involving situations in public and high-risk areas that involved predominantly men, in which women have likely learned to engage in avoidance behavior or to engage in self-protective strategies (Gardner, 1989; May et al., 2010; West, 1996). As a result, our findings only provide a glimpse of the bystander actions that individuals presenting as women (and men) may demonstrate. Our findings also must be interpreted within the context of a large, densely populated inner-city area in the Netherlands, and may not be generalizable to rural areas or to other countries. Although prior research has found no substantial differences in bystander intervention across different countries (Philpot et al., 2020), replication in different geographical areas is warranted.

Other limitations inherent to the chosen method are that the footage did not include audio, so we were unable to identify and analyze verbal bystander behaviors. Also, although the camera operators were given specific instructions, a certain bias in the selection of incidents to be recorded may not fully be prevented. Neither can we be certain that each conflict was captured from start to finish, even though we selected footage that did not contain major interruptions. While several shortcomings may be overcome by triangulation of the footage with other data sources (e.g., police case files) (Lindegard & Bernasco, 2018), such complementary information was not available to us.

Conclusion

Our analysis of real-life footage from public conflicts shows that bystanders engage in a variety of actions beyond intervention. Results indicate that men, compared to women, were overall more likely to physically intervene in conflicts. Contrary to what was expected, women were *not* more likely to engage in affiliative forms of intervention, but, instead, engaged more often in inattentive action. Although men were more likely to intervene physically, they were also more likely to react to the conflict by laughing, filming, or cheering on the conflict parties. The results suggest that bystanders who witness conflicts in the context of public space display some gender differences in whether and how they engage themselves in the events.

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Chapter 3

Limited evidence that the gender composition of public conflicts is associated with bystander intervention: A video-observational study

Van Baak, C., Liebst, L.S., & Lindegaard, M.R. (2024). Limited evidence that the gender composition of public conflicts is associated with bystander intervention: A video-observational study. *Crime & Delinquency*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00111287241298693>

CVB conceived the research, performed the analysis and wrote the text. LSL contributed to the analysis and reviewed and edited the text. MRL reviewed and edited the text.

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Abstract

Research suggests that the gender composition of conflict parties influences how bystanders perceive violence, reflecting constructions of masculinity and femininity that promote women's protection. Relying on CCTV footage of public conflicts in the Netherlands, we ran logistic regression models at the situational level ($N = 66$ conflicts) and multilevel models at the individual level ($N = 1,954$ bystanders) to examine the relationship between conflict parties' gender composition and bystander intervention. Further, we tested whether perceived intimate ties between conflict parties were associated with intervention. Gender composition was not linked to intervention probability, but patterns in the data point towards less bystander intervention in intimate conflicts, though not statistically clear. Understanding contextual conflict variations is crucial for effective bystander intervention strategies.

Introduction

Decades of research have been dedicated to the study of bystander behavior. The majority of this work focuses on the 'bystander effect,' proposing that the presence of additional bystanders diffuses the responsibility for the situation and thus decreases each bystander's intervention likelihood (Darley & Latané, 1968). Despite early studies finding support for the bystander effect (e.g., Darley & Latané, 1968; Latané & Nida, 1981), more recent research relying on CCTV footage of real-life conflicts in public space suggests that bystander intervention is much more common than previously assumed, especially in contexts of violently dangerous events with victims in serious need of help (Lindegaard et al., 2022; Philpot et al., 2020). The likelihood of intervention has been found to be influenced by a range of factors, such as the level of danger (Lindegaard et al., 2022), social relationship with the antagonist (Liebst et al., 2019), presence of other bystanders (Liebst et al., 2019), and bystander's gender (Liebst et al., 2019; Van Baak et al., 2024). Yet, while previous research suggests that the gender composition of conflict parties may additionally influence bystander intervention behavior (e.g., Harris & Cook, 1994; Moule & Powers, 2021), this has rarely been analyzed in naturally occurring real-life situations.

Importantly, violent crime is often pictured as men being violent to other men, which has traditionally been the focus in violence research, while domestic and gendered violence have developed relatively isolated from mainstream disciplines (Walby et al., 2014). Although men who are victimized by other men are overrepresented in, for example, homicide rates (Gartner & Jung 2014), violence against women often remains invisible in crime statistics. The notion that violence is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men against other men is, as such, inaccurate, and it is crucial to incorporate gender into violence research (Walby et al., 2014). Importantly, the gender composition of conflict parties may also impact how people perceive and respond to violent encounters, with previous studies suggesting that bystanders report a greater likelihood to intervene in men's violence against a woman than against another man, as a result of aggression against women being perceived as more harmful (Carlson, 2008; Harris & Cook, 1994; Moule & Powers, 2021). In addition, bystanders who intervened in a mixed-gender conflict have been found to be more likely to support the woman and target the man (Ejbye-Ernst et al., 2022; Rogers et al., 2019), which has been attributed by some scholars to a norm protecting women (Felson, 2000; Rogers et al., 2019). Previous research has shown that individuals construct violence by men against women as unacceptable, often portraying women as vulnerable and in need of protection (see e.g., Carlson, 2008; Hollander, 2001). This perception is tied to the belief that men's physical strength poses a danger and has the potential to

cause harm to women (Carlson, 2008; Hollander, 2001; Ravn, 2018; Sundaram, 2013). Consequently, associations between femininity and perceived vulnerability, and masculinity and dangerousness (Hollander, 2001), could influence how individuals perceive and respond to violence (Van Baak et al., 2024).

Although it is well-established that these perceptions of violence tend to vary, less is known about the extent to which individuals *act* when they witness violent situations in various gender compositions—in particular in real-life situations. Interestingly, observational studies in night-life settings found that third-party involvement was most common in conflicts involving men, and least likely in mixed-gender conflicts, potentially as a result of the perceived greater severity in male conflicts (Parks et al., 2013; Wells & Graham, 1999). As such, gender composition appears to play a role in bystander's intervention behavior, but studies relying on different sources (i.e., self-report data versus observational studies) report different results in various settings. These prior observational studies were conducted in barrooms, where male honor may be particularly on display (Graham & Wells, 2001), resulting in a need to rely on observational real-life data in public space more generally. Adding to this, perceived intimate ties between conflict parties additionally seem to influence bystander actions in conflicts, as bystanders are typically less likely to intervene when they perceive a man and a woman as intimate partners as opposed to strangers, as the conflict might then be perceived as a private matter (Rogers et al., 2019; Shotland & Straw, 1976).

A suitable method that can be used to fill this gap is the use of video analysis of public security footage, which allows us to observe how conflicts occur in natural settings (Lindgaard & Bernasco, 2018). Although this observational method does not allow to grasp the inner motivational causes leading bystanders to intervene in conflicts across various gender compositions, it does provide us with the opportunity to describe and analyze individuals' actual behavior in natural settings—as opposed to self-reports of inner states, which do not necessarily correspond to behavior (Baumeister et al., 2007). To this end, we analyze 66 public conflicts captured on camera 1) between men, or 2) between a man and a woman, involving a total of 1,954 bystanders.

First, we examine the *situational* likelihood of intervention occurring in these types of conflicts. In other words, how likely is it that men and women involved in public conflicts with men will *receive* help from one or more bystanders? (i.e., from the victim's perspective). Second, we examine the *individual* likelihood that bystanders intervene in these conflicts, as it has been the traditional approach the bystander literature. In other words, how likely is it that individual bystanders *provide* help to men and

women involved in public conflicts with men? (i.e., from the bystander's perspective). Here, we additionally examine bystander's gender as a moderator on the association between gender composition and the intervention likelihood. These situational and individual levels of analysis serve an important methodological purpose of avoiding ecological and atomistic fallacies—i.e., associations found at either the situational and individual level of analysis cannot be assumed to generalize to the other level (Diez Roux, 2002). In the field of bystander studies, the lack of distinction between situational and individual-level associations led to misconceptions about helping behavior, confusing the distinction between “whether someone intervenes” versus “whether a specific individual intervenes” (Stalder, 2008). As such, we aim to provide insights into bystander intervention across gender compositions from various perspectives, while avoiding ecological and atomistic fallacies.

Finally, we explore whether the likelihood of bystander intervention changes when conflicts occur between individuals perceived as having intimate ties, as previous research has found that perceived relationships may inhibit intervention behavior (Rogers et al., 2019; Shotland & Straw, 1976). Knowledge on the extent to which the gender composition of conflicts and perceived intimate relationships may inhibit or illicit bystander intervention in public space is crucial in light of practical and policy efforts. These insights contribute to a greater understanding of the extent to which gender shapes real-life bystander behavior in violent encounters, and can be used to tailor intervention programs.

Bystander intervention and gender composition

Research relying on self-report data suggests that individuals express more disapproval and report a greater likelihood to intervene when they encounter a man's aggression against a woman compared to man-to-man aggression (Harris, 1991; Moule & Powers, 2021) and woman-to-man aggression (Felson & Feld, 2009; Hamby & Jackson, 2010; Harris & Cook, 1994; Rogers et al., 2019; Russell et al., 2015; Sorenson & Taylor, 2005; Venäläinen, 2020). The strong disapproval of violence against women due to perceived physical differences has been found to be persistent in a range of studies in the Global North, including both representative samples (Felson & Feld, 2009) and college students (Hamby & Jackson, 2010; Seelau & Seelau, 2005). In addition to support for women during violent encounters, previous research suggests that women are more likely than men to receive help in general, particularly provided by men (Eagly & Crowley, 1986). Scholars have often attributed these perceptions on violence and gender, as well as the willingness to intervene, to gender stereotypes or

social norms, including a norm protecting women or chivalry norms, emphasizing the protection of women as part of the male gender role (Eagly & Crowley, 1986; Felson, 2000; Felson et al., 2023; Rogers et al., 2019; Sorenson & Taylor, 2005). These social norms have been attributed by scholars to various origins, including the division of labor (Eagly, 2009) and sex differences in physical size (e.g., Felson et al., 2023; Hamby & Jackson, 2010).

More broadly considered, such understanding of violence and gender can be attributed to the concept of “doing gender” (West & Zimmerman, 1987), meaning that individuals respond to situated normative beliefs about masculinity and femininity through their performance (Miller, 2002). Several studies suggest that individuals construct violence as part of normative masculine gender performances (Carlson, 2008; Cobbina et al., 2010; Hollander, 2001; Ravn, 2018; Sundaram 2013), and perceive violence between men as justified and natural (Carlson, 2008; Hollander, 2001; Sundaram, 2013). In contrast, individuals construct violence against women, who were depicted as the weaker sex and as ‘worthy’ of protection, as unacceptable, which was attributed to the perceived danger of men’s physical bodies and the perceived ability to cause harm to women due to their relative strength (Carlson, 2008; Ravn, 2018; Sundaram, 2013). Yet, in situations where a woman matches or surpasses a man in physical size, individuals dismissed violence by a woman against a man as non-threatening or implausible, indicating constructions of women as inherently weak and vulnerable regardless of actual physical size (Hollander, 2001; Sundaram, 2013). By constructing women as appropriately feminine due to perceived vulnerability, and men as appropriately masculine due to perceived danger, individuals reinforce such gendered notions, which may affect how individuals keep themselves safe and navigate through public and private space (Hollander, 2001; Sundaram, 2013). Individuals may reinforce these gendered notions through their social interactions when they witness violent situations by intervening, in particular, in violent encounters involving women due to perceived vulnerability (Carlson, 2008; Hollander, 2001).

While previous studies indicate that the gender composition in conflicts plays a crucial role in individuals’ perceptions and willingness to intervene (e.g., Hamby & Jackson, 2010; Rogers et al., 2019; Sorenson & Taylor, 2005), bystander behavior across gender compositions has rarely been studied using observations of real-life behavior in natural settings. Instead, the vast majority of studies have relied on self-report data by using hypothetical scenarios (e.g., Hamby & Jackson, 2010; Moule & Powers, 2019) or surveys (e.g., Rogers et al., 2019), while self-reports may not accurately reflect individuals’ *actual* behavior, and there tends to be a discrepancy between what people say they would do and what they actually do (Baumeister et al., 2007). A few exceptions include the work

by Wells and Graham (1999) and Parks et al., (2013), who conducted real-life observations to analyze the involvement of third parties in conflicts in barroom settings. As opposed to results from self-reported data, Wells and Graham (1999) found that intervention was more likely in conflicts involving men only compared to mixed-gender conflicts and conflicts between women, suggesting that intervention is *less* common in conflicts involving women. They proposed that conflicts involving women in barroom settings might be less severe and may not necessitate assistance to the same degree (Wells & Graham, 1999). Further, Parks et al., (2013) found that the odds of intervention by third parties were higher for conflicts involving men compared to mixed-gender conflicts, with intervention being least likely in incidents involving men's aggression against a woman. According to the authors, this could potentially be attributed to the specific settings of barrooms in which aggression tends to be a male phenomenon and where male honor may be on display (Graham & Wells, 2001). In this specific setting, mutual aggression by men may elicit more concern due to potential risk of escalation whereas conflicts involving women mainly involved invasive or unwanted behaviors that may have been viewed as less dangerous (Parks et al., 2013).

Another exception consists of the work by Ejbye-Ernst and colleagues (2022), who used CCTV footage of real-life interpersonal conflicts, to analyze whom bystanders target when they intervene in conflicts. In conflicts between a man and a woman, bystanders were more likely to *target* the man than the woman, suggesting that protection of women in public may indeed be performed in real-life mixed-gender conflicts. Yet, whether bystanders are additionally more *likely* to intervene in mixed-gender conflicts than in man-to-man conflicts has only been studied in specific settings (i.e., barrooms; Parks et al., 2013; Wells & Graham, 1999), but not in real-life conflicts in public space more generally. Further, while bystanders' gender has been found to affect if and how bystanders intervene in public settings (Liebst et al., 2019; Van Baak et al., 2024), and the perception of intimate ties between conflict parties may additionally play a role in intervention (Rogers et al., 2019), these aspects have not yet been included in observational studies that analyzed intervention across gender compositions.

Intimate conflicts

When conflicts between men and women occur, they involve individuals in close relationships more often compared to conflicts between men (Graham & Wells, 2001). While aggression between individuals having intimate ties often takes place behind closed doors, previous research suggests that this is not exclusively the case, and it is not unlikely for individuals enter conflicts or aggression in public space where

witnesses are present (Hart & Miethe 2008; Truman & Morgan, 2014). Importantly, the existence of close, intimate ties between men and women, or the perception thereof, may alter how individuals construct violence. Despite violence between men and women being constructed as unacceptable because of the associations of femininity with perceived vulnerability, and masculinity with perceived dangerousness (Hollander, 2001), intimate conflicts tend to be constructed as private matters, even in the context of aggression (Ermer et al., 2021). Although bystanders have been found to be more likely to support women during conflicts between men and women, there tends to be less support for women when the conflict parties are involved in a close relationship (Rogers et al., 2019). An early study by Shotland and Straw (1976) similarly indicated in a series of experiments that bystanders were less likely to intervene in a violent fight between a man and a woman when they believed they were intimate partners rather than strangers. Bystanders who witnessed the intimate partner fight stated that they were hesitant to intervene because they were unsure whether their help was wanted and felt that it was none of their business (Shotland & Straw, 1976). Vignette research similarly implies that perceptions of relationships, which are seen as private, form an important aspect in the decision to intervene when witnessing acts of aggression (Ermer et al., 2021). These findings suggest that intervention in conflicts between men and women who are perceived as partners may be inhibited due to beliefs that these conflicts are a private matter (Rogers et al., 2019). The potential inhibition effect of a perceived relationship between conflict parties may not be limited to perceived heterosexual couples, as individuals may also affirm their masculinity by normalizing violence among men in same-sex relationships (Potoczniak et al., 2003).

Based on previous research reviewed above, we hypothesize as follows. Initially, two hypotheses examined the situational intervention likelihood as a function of the gender and the relationship of the conflicting parties. As mentioned, individuals have been found to be more willing to intervene in men's violence against a woman than against another man, potentially as a result of aggression against women being perceived as more harmful (Carlson, 2008; Harris & Cook, 1994; Moule & Powers, 2021). Yet, research also suggests that violence between men and women that involves individuals maintaining intimate ties tends to be perceived as a private matter (Ermer et al., 2021; Rogers et al., 2019), which could hinder intervention in these situations. As such, we expect the following:

H1: The situational likelihood of bystander intervention will be higher in conflicts between a man and a woman compared to conflicts between men.

H2: The situational likelihood of bystander intervention will be lower in conflicts between individuals perceived as maintaining intimate ties compared to conflicts between individuals without perceived intimate ties.

Additionally, two hypotheses tested the individual intervention likelihood as a product of the gender and the relationship of the conflicting parties, which is important to include in addition to the situational level in order to avoid ecological and atomistic fallacies:

H3: The individual likelihood of bystander intervention will be higher in conflicts between a man and a woman compared to conflicts between men.

H4: The individual likelihood of bystander intervention will be lower in conflicts between individuals perceived as maintaining intimate ties compared to conflicts between individuals without perceived intimate ties.

Methods

Data were security footage of real-life interpersonal conflicts in public space in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, which was recorded from April to August 2017 (data and script are available as supplementary material at <https://tinyurl.com/3xdf6e2w>).¹ In Amsterdam, there are approximately 300 public security cameras located in areas where public disturbances cluster (e.g., nightlife, commercial, drug dealing, and tourist areas). The cameras are actively monitored by municipal employees, who typically only record potentially criminal offenses of interest for the police. However, to avoid biasing the data toward severe cases, we instructed them to also record low-level incidents. The recorded incidents were then saved for the current study. The Netherlands Public Prosecution Services granted data access under strict privacy and security regulations, and the study was positively evaluated by the Ethics Advisory Board at the University of Amsterdam.

1. Note that the current data has been sourced from the same pool of data, which a number of other studies have also analyzed for related but distinct study purposes (e.g., Ejbye-Ernst, 2023; Ejbye-Ernst et al., 2022; Philpot et al., 2020). Specifically, we flag that a few of the current videos were also included in Philpot et al. (2020) who likewise reported a high situational intervention rate (see Footnote 3 for further information). Further, we used videos that were also included in the dataset used by Ejbye-Ernst et al. (2022). Our study differs from the study by Ejbye-Ernst et al. (2022) in several ways. Ejbye-Ernst et al. (2022) focused on whom bystanders *target* when they intervene, and found that bystanders were more likely to target the man in a conflict between a man and a woman. In contrast, we focus on the *likelihood* of intervention across different gender compositions, which, as such, does not say anything about bystanders' target selection. In the study by Ejbye-Ernst et al. (2022), the data consisted exclusively of conflicts in which intervention occurred, while we included all conflicts—regardless of intervention—to examine the likelihood of intervention across different gender compositions. As such, the purpose and data of our study are distinct.

We included videos in our study if they met the following inclusion criteria, which are often applied within the literature (Nassauer & Legewie, 2022; Philpot et al., 2020). (1) The footage must include an observable conflict, defined as a disagreement between at least two people in which at least one individual showed signs of non-verbal aggression, such as aggressive gesturing, pushing, or hitting. (2) The footage must contain bystanders who witness the conflict. We considered individuals to be bystanders when they were aware of the conflict, or had the potential to be aware, illustrated by attentiveness towards the conflict through movements, face and body directions or staring. This includes bystanders who are not looking at the conflict directly, but who walk through the middle of the conflict, change course to avoid it, or who are in closer proximity than other bystanders who noticed the conflict. (3) When the conflict starts, there are no police or paramedics present. Videos in which police or paramedics arrived during or after the conflict were included in the sample, but the actions of bystanders were no longer included after their arrival, as their presence may affect if and how bystanders intervene. (4) Videos need to show the sequence of the conflict without substantial breaks. (5) The clips need to have a technical quality (e.g., resolution, brightness) that allow for detailed behavioral observation.

Among all videos collected, 120 (72.7%) showed an interpersonal conflict between two or more citizens. Of this subset, 27 videos had an insufficient technical quality, 16 did not capture the action sequence, and in 16 videos police or paramedics were present from the start of the conflict. Further, in four videos there were no bystanders present, or the bystanders were not aware or there was unclarity about their awareness. Although we ideally would have included conflicts between women, which would have allowed us to compare these conflicts to conflicts between men and conflicts between a man and a woman, there was only one video in data that involved a conflict between two women. Therefore, we decided to exclude this video from our analysis. This resulted in a final sample of 66 clips containing 1,954 bystanders, of which 1,372 were coded as men and 582 as women.

Coding procedure

The coding process began with a qualitative and inductive phase in which a subsample of the videos was watched and analyzed. Additionally, a random sample of 10 videos were transcribed to get a fine-grained understanding of the types of actions, and these transcripts were subject to an inductive analysis. We then compared the action types identified in this qualitative phase with the bystander intervention actions that have previously been developed (e.g., Bloch et al., 2018; Ejbye-Ernst, 2023; Levine et al., 2011; Philpot et al., 2020). In total, we identified 13 types of bystander intervention actions, ranging from calming and open-hand gestures to violence against a conflict

party on the ground, and these actions were summarized in an 'ethogram' (Jones et al., 2018), consisting of a detailed behavioral descriptions of all actions. An overview of the ethogram can be found in Appendix C and in the supplementary material.

Next, the ethogram was interrater reliability tested by randomly selecting nine videos (13.6% of the dataset) for independent coding by two coders, after the first author had trained the second coder on a random subsample of videos. In the nine videos used for the interrater reliability test, 153 bystanders were double-coded (i.e., 116 men and 37 women).² Krippendorff's (2004) alpha (α) tests were used to measure the agreement of the coders. Note that all interrater reliability scores as included in our analyses scored between .74 and 1.00, indicating good to excellent agreement (Fleiss, 1981). An overview of the alpha scores for each specific intervention code can be found in Appendix D and in the supplementary material. Finally, the interrater reliably-tested ethogram was used to code the video footage in Behavioral Observation Research Interactive Software (BORIS) (Friard & Gamba, 2016).

Dependent variable

The dependent variable was *bystander intervention*, which was coded as binary variable, where 0 = no intervention, and 1 = at least one of the 13 bystander intervention actions was performed. The dependent variable was both measured at the situational and the individual level. At the situational level, we recorded for each of the 66 videos whether at least one the present bystanders intervened. At the individual level, we recorded for each of the 1,964 bystanders whether they intervened or not

Independent variables

The *gender of the conflict parties* was coded as a binary variable, where 0 = conflict between men, and 1 = conflict between a man and a woman. Further, *intimate conflicts* were coded as a binary variable, where 0 = conflict between individuals without intimate ties, and 1 = conflict between individuals with perceived intimate ties ($\alpha = .74$). While individuals' relationship status in prior studies is typically based on self-report data, previous research suggests that observers are very accurate in judging real-life personal relationships (Liebst et al., 2023). To assess whether conflict parties could be perceived as having intimate ties, we relied on non-verbal displays of such ties, such as kissing, placing an arm around the waist or shoulder, and leaning bodies against one another (Afifi & Johnson 1999, 2005; Liebst et al., 2023). While

2. To assure that both coders coded the same individual, each individual was given an identification number, accompanied by a detailed person description. Further, the start time of the conflict was identified by the first author and shared with the second coder, meaning that both coders started coding at approximately the same time.

touching is a key non-verbal cue in any relationship, it is a crucial form of non-verbal communication between romantic partners (Ivy & Gleason, 2022). In addition, we examined their proxemics, as individuals maintaining intimate ties typically maintain closer physical distances than people in other kinds of relationships (e.g., friends and family members), while, in conflict, they decrease touching, increase physical distance, and may leave the scene (Andersen et al., 2006; Ivy & Gleason, 2022; Guerrero, 2013; Sluzki, 2016). Note that this code is inclusive of all forms of pre-existing romantic or sexual ties, which may vary from casual and short-term encounters to potentially committed and long-term relationships. For each conflict – across all gender compositions – we coded whether the conflict parties were perceived as intimate ties, but these ties were only observed in man-to-woman conflicts within the data.

Finally, the *gender of the bystander* was coded as a binary variable, where 0 = man, and 1 = woman. While we initially left open the possibility to code bystander's gender presentation as 'other,' this code was not observed during the coding. Gender presentation was based on displays of how individuals presented themselves in public space, including their clothing, hairstyle, and movements. We reached a perfect interrater reliability score for gender presentation ($\alpha = 1.00$). While this indicates that coders agreed on the gender presentation of the coded individual, this does not tell us whether our interpretation of gender presentation is similar to gender self-identification of the individuals observed.

Control variables

The *duration of the conflict* was measured as a continuous variable in seconds. Note that a few conflicts lasted so long that they could be considered outliers, and these values were winzorized to the outer fence (i.e., three times the interquartile range of the variable). This variable was included because longer conflicts could plausibly provide a larger window of opportunity for intervention. *Severity of the conflict* was included as dummy variables capturing the highest level of severity reached during the situation: low (e.g., aggressive gesturing), medium (e.g., punches, kicks), or high (e.g., violence toward a person on the ground) (in defining these levels, we followed Lindegaard et al., 2022). This variable was included because conflict danger is a well-known predictor of bystander intervention (Fischer et al., 2011). The *number of bystanders* during the conflict was measured as a count of all present persons defined as bystanders. We included this variable because the bystander numbers have long been assumed to influence the intervention likelihood (Darley & Latané, 1968; though note that the generalizability of this bystander effect dynamic to real-life dangerous or violent events is uncertain, see Fischer et al., 2011).

Analytic strategy

Data were estimated with logistic regression models (in Stata 16) due to the binary outcome variables. For the situational analysis, we used standard single level models, which predict the situational likelihood that at least one of the present bystanders intervenes to help (i.e., from the victim's perspective). For the individual analysis, we used two-level multilevel models with a random intercept to account for the hierarchical data structure, with bystanders nested in conflicts (Hox et al., 2017). All statistical tests were evaluated against an alpha level of .05, but a Bonferroni-adjusted alpha of $.05/4 = .0125$ was applied to account for multiple testing of four interlinked hypotheses (Abdi, 2007). This is necessary because a multiple comparisons problem arises as a result of running four different tests, which increases the chances of making a Type I error. Tests that met the .05 and .0125 thresholds were described as statistically 'suggestive' and 'clear,' respectively (Dushoff et al., 2019). In addition to *p*-values, Bayes factors were also reported as test statistics, which have the advantage of allowing for quantification of evidence in favor of the null hypothesis (Dienes, 2014). The Bayes factors were approximated from Bayesian information criterion, and assumed an uninformative unit information prior (Wagenmakers, 2007). The following thresholds to evaluate the relative evidence of the null hypothesis (H_0) vis-à-vis the alternative hypothesis (H_1): 1-3, weak; 3-10, moderate; >10, strong (van Doorn et al., 2021).

Results

Descriptive statistics

Across the 66 conflicts, the situational intervention rate was 83% (SD = 0.38), indicating a high intervention rate. This means that in approximately eight out of ten incidents, at least one bystander intervened at some point.³ Most of the conflicts in the data occurred between men (53/66 = 80.3%) compared to conflicts between a man and a woman (13/66 = 19.7%). Of those conflicts between a man and a woman, more than half occurred between individuals showing cues of intimate ties (8/13 = 61.5%).

3. As mentioned in Footnote 1, a few of the current videos were also included in Philpot et al. (2020). This means that the reported intervention rate could not be considered a fully independent result. Further, note that Philpot et al. (2020) exclusively focused on de-escalatory acts of intervention, whereas the current study adopted a broader measure of intervention, also including, for example, aggressive gesturing and shoving (see ethogram in Appendix C or in supplementary material). Importantly, a similarly high situational intervention rate (86.9%) was found in the new sample included in the supplementary analysis, which is a fully independent result. This challenges the findings of early bystander research indicating that bystanders typically remain passive in emergencies (e.g., Latané & Darley, 1969; Latané & Nida, 1981), and provides further evidence that individuals victimized in public space are, in fact, likely to receive help from others (Philpot et al., 2020).

The duration of the observed conflicts varied substantially (min = 14 s, max = 2.389 s) and had a median value of around 1 min. The observed events had more typically a medium (30/66 = 45.5%) or low severity (32/66 = 48.48%) compared to a high severity (4/66 = 6.1%). Of the 1,954 bystanders observed, 236 (12.1%) engaged in at least one intervention act, and 1,718 (87.9%) remained non-involved.

Confirmatory analyses

In terms of our hypotheses, we first examined the *situational* intervention likelihood. Unlike our expectation in Hypothesis 1, data indicated that man-versus-woman conflicts had a *lower* intervention rate (9/13 = 69.2%) compared to man-versus-man conflicts (46/55 = 83.6%). However, a regression test suggested that this difference was statistically non-significant (see Figure 1), with the Bayes factor offering weak-to-moderate evidence of the null (H_0) over the alternative (H_1) hypothesis (OR = .34, 95% CI [.08, 1.42], $p = .139$, $BF_{01} = 2.9$). All these results contradict the hypothesis.

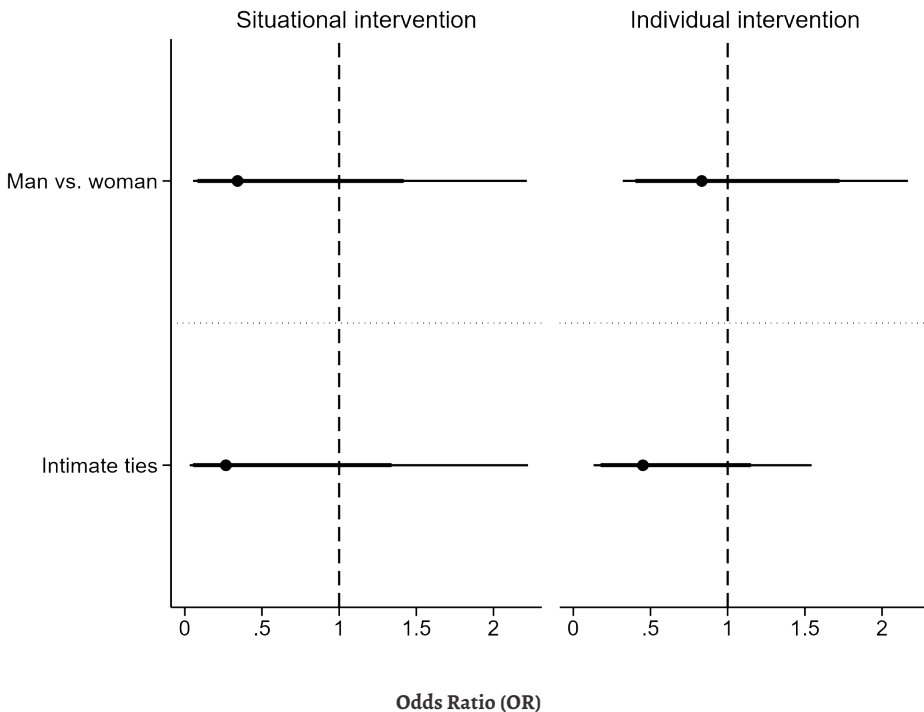


Figure 1. Four univariate regression models predicting situational and individual bystander intervention
Note. Thin and broad lines are 95% and 99% confidence intervals, respectively.

Further, the intervention rate was lower in conflicts between intimate ties (5/8=62.5%) compared to non-intimates (4/5=80%). However, a regression model found that this difference was not significant, as intimate conflicts did *not* predict less intervention (OR = .27, 95% CI [.05, 1.3], $p = .109$, $BF_{01} = 2.5$). The Bayes factor suggests that the observed data were approximately 2.5 times more likely to occur under H_0 than H_1 , that is, weak evidence in favor of the null hypothesis. These results run counter to Hypothesis 2.

Second, we considered the *individual* intervention likelihood. Contrary to Hypothesis 3, the bystanders were *not* found to be more likely to intervene in man-versus-woman conflicts compared to man-versus-man conflicts (OR = .83, 95% CI [.40, 1.7], $p = .621$, $BF_{01} = 39.1$). The Bayes factor suggested that data was around 40 times more likely under H_0 than H_1 . In contrast to Hypothesis 4, conflicts between intimate ties did *not* predict a lower intervention likelihood compared to non-intimate conflicts, not even when using traditional alpha values (OR = .45, 95% CI [.18, 1.15], $p = .096$, $BF_{01} = 10.5$). The Bayes factor offered moderate-to-strong evidence of H_0 over H_1 .

To assess the robustness of the above results, we ran all of the models adjusted for control variables (i.e., duration of the conflict, severity of the conflict, number of bystanders). All non-significant results remained unchanged. A detailed overview can be found in the output in the supplementary material. It should be noted that all models in Figure 1 yielded negative parameter estimates and, as such, the overall trend in the data conflicts with the expectation (Hypothesis 1 and 3) that the presence of a woman in public conflicts promotes bystander intervention. Instead, data rather evidence an equivalence in the bystander intervention likelihood when comparing man-on-man conflicts with man-on-woman conflicts, in particular at the individual level. Further, the statistical analysis leaves us with limited evidence that conflicts between intimates were negatively linked with bystander helping (Hypothesis 2 and 4).

Additionally, we examined whether the gender of bystanders moderated the association between the gender composition in the conflict and the intervention likelihood. Interaction effects were tested as second differences, as recommended for logistic models (Mize, 2019). However, there were no significant differences between men and women in intervention likelihood based on the gender composition of conflict parties (second difference = -0.03 , $p = .539$, $BF_{01} = 39.1$), or in conflicts between intimate ties (second difference = 0.05 , $p = .343$, $BF_{01} = 39.2$).

Exploratory analyses

We conducted additional exploratory analyses by using dummy variables for the gender composition of conflict parties, in which we distinguished man-to-man conflicts, man-to-woman non-intimate conflicts, and man-to-woman intimate conflicts, and their association with bystander intervention. In our previous analyses, we either included man-to-woman conflicts—involving both intimate and non-intimate conflicts—or intimate conflicts as independent variables, and were unable to compare these groups to one another. Therefore, we ran additional analyses to explore whether differences emerge between these groups.

As can be seen in Table 1, bystander intervention was most common in man-to-man conflicts. While bystander intervention also occurred in most man-to-woman non-intimate conflicts, intervention was least likely in conflicts between individuals perceived as having intimate ties. We statistically tested this at the situational level using a Firth logistic regression model with a pairwise comparison of marginal effects. The results suggest that, while approaching significance, there is no significant difference between man-to-man conflicts and intimate conflicts at the traditional alpha value ($p = .08$). Further, there are no significant differences between man-to-man conflicts and man-to-woman non-intimate conflicts ($p = .48$) nor between man-to-woman non-intimate and intimate conflicts ($p = .58$).

Table 1. Crosstabulation of Intervention against Gender Composition at Situational Level (N = 66 Conflicts)

		Intervention		No intervention		Total
		N	%	N	%	
Gender composition of conflict	Man-to-man	46	86.8	7	13.2	53
	Man-to-woman (non-partners)	4	80.0	1	20.0	5
	Man-to-woman (partners)	5	62.5	3	37.5	8
Total		55	83.3	11	16.7	66

At the individual level, which is displayed in Table 2, the highest percentage of intervening bystanders emerged in man-to-woman non-intimate conflicts, and the lowest percentage in man-to-woman intimate conflicts. Using a multilevel regression model with a pairwise comparison, the results suggest that the differences between intimate conflicts and (man-to-woman) non-intimate conflicts are not significant, though approaching significance using a traditional alpha value ($p = .051$). In addition,

the difference in intervention in man-to-man conflicts and intimate conflicts, was not significant ($p = .11$). Lastly, when comparing man-to-woman non-intimate conflicts to man-to-man conflicts, the comparison was not significant ($p = .29$).

These findings indicate that while there is no strong statistical evidence that the perception of intimate ties between a man and a woman discourages bystander intervention, the overall patterns in the data point in the direction of less intervention in intimate conflicts compared to man-to-man and man-to-woman non-intimate conflicts. As the subsamples of man-to-woman conflicts are very small, it is possible that significance may have been detected if the sample were larger.

Table 2. Crosstabulation of Intervention against Gender Composition at Individual Level (N=1,954 Bystanders)

		Intervention		No intervention		Total
		N	%	n	%	
Gender composition of conflict	Man-to-man	189	11.8	1,410	88.2	1,599
	Man-to-woman (non-intimate ties)	29	23.4	95	76.6	124
	Man-to-woman (intimate ties)	18	7.8	213	92.2	231
Total		236	12.1	1,718	87.9	1,954

Supplementary analysis

Given the small sample size at the situational level—potentially making our tests underpowered to identify possible actual effects—we collected additional data and conducted supplementary analyses on a larger sample. More specifically, we created an additional dataset of CCTV videos that were collected in 2023 according to the same process and guidelines. This additional data collection resulted in 168 new videos that met the inclusion criteria (see Methods section), of which 138 were coded as man-to-man conflicts, 22 as man-to-woman (non-intimates) and 8 as man-to-woman (intimates). Again, there was a high situational intervention rate, with intervention occurring in 87% of these conflicts. Note that these videos were only coded at the situational level, and not at the individual level, given that our potential power issue is at this level of analysis. We added these new videos to our original dataset at the situational level and replicated our confirmatory and exploratory analysis. This larger dataset comprises 234 conflicts, of which 191 consisted of man-to-man conflicts, 27 as man-to-woman (non-intimates), and 16 as man-to-woman (intimates).

Validating our prior null result, the regression test suggested that there were no significant differences of situational intervention likelihood across gender compositions, with the Bayes factor offering moderate evidence of the null hypothesis (H_0) over the alternative (H_1) hypothesis (OR = .54, 95% CI [.23, 1.27], $p = .159$, $BF_{01} = 6.0$). Further, the regression model now suggests that the situational likelihood of intervention was lower in intimate conflicts compared to all non-intimate conflicts (OR = .32, 95% CI [.10, 1.00], $p = .051$, $BF_{10} = 2.9$), with the Bayes factor now offering weak support in favor of the hypothesis (H_1). Note, however, that the result depends on the alpha level used: When evaluated against a traditional 5% alpha level, the association *almost* reached significance, but not when using its Bonferroni-corrected counterpart. The Bonferroni-correction accounts for the multiple comparison problem by adjusting the significance level when the same test is repeated twice ($.05/2 = .025$). Nevertheless, most informative with respect to this result is the estimated effect, which is non-trivial in magnitude: intervention was found to be 18 percentage points less likely to occur in intimate conflicts.

Finally, we replicated the exploratory analyses by using dummy variables for the gender composition of conflict parties, which again indicated no significant differences between man-to-man conflicts and man-to-woman non-intimate conflicts ($p = .63$) nor between man-to-woman non-intimate and intimate conflicts ($p = .21$). The comparison between man-to-man conflicts and intimate conflicts now reached significance at a traditional alpha value ($p = .035$), but not when applying a Bonferroni-corrected alpha.⁴ To conclude, although the evidence is not conclusive with a larger sample size, the data suggest a trend towards less intervention in conflicts between individuals perceived as having intimate ties.

Discussion

While previous research suggests that the gender composition of conflict parties influences how bystanders act in violent encounters, few studies have assessed the variation of bystander behavior across gender compositions in real-life conflicts. In the current study, we aimed to fill this gap by comparing the likelihood of

4. Note that these results hinge on what regression estimate effect is used. The pairwise comparison of the Firth logistic regression model was used on the original sample to address potential issues related to the small sample size at the situational level. As these issues become less relevant in the supplementary analysis on the larger sample, we also ran the pairwise comparison of a logistic regression model as an alternative specification to test its robustness. The findings remain unchanged, though the significant difference between intervention in man-to-man conflicts and man-to-woman intimate conflicts slightly decreased ($p = .048$).

intervention in real-life conflicts between men and those between a man and a woman. Note that we considered this likelihood at the situational level (i.e., from the victim's perspective) as well as the individual level (i.e., from the bystander's perspective). As the perception of intimate ties between conflict parties may inhibit bystander intervention (Rogers et al., 2019; Shotland & Straw 1976), we additionally compared conflicts between individuals with perceived intimate ties – which in the current sample was only found between men and women – to non-intimate conflicts. In addition, we examined whether the gender of the bystanders moderated the association between gender composition – as well as intimate conflicts – and intervention likelihood at the individual level. In the sections below, we will unpack the main findings.

First, the results indicate that there were no significant differences in bystander intervention when comparing man-to-man conflicts to (all) man-to-woman conflicts, regardless of whether the severity of the conflict was included in the model. This finding was consistent at both the situational and individual level, and the evidence in favor of the null hypothesis was relatively strong. As such, there is no statistical evidence that gender composition, by itself, may inhibit or encourage bystander intervention in real-life conflicts in public space. Importantly, intervention was more likely than the lack thereof across *all* types of conflicts, suggesting that the likelihood that at least someone will provide help is persistent, regardless of the victim's or perpetrator's perceived gender. As almost all victims were likely to receive help from one or more bystanders, this likely suppresses the possibility of such contextual differences to emerge in terms of bystander intervention likelihood. While the dataset at the situational level was small, supplementary analyses using a larger dataset confirm this result. As such, we do not find support for previously reported findings that men's aggression against women is more likely to receive intervention compared to man-on-man aggression (Carlson, 2008; Harris 1991; Moule & Powers 2021) nor for findings from observational studies in barroom settings suggesting that man-to-man conflicts receive more intervention (Parks et al., 2013; Wells & Graham 1999). Importantly, however, while our data included quite some conflicts in night-life areas, our observations were based on conflicts in public space more generally rather than a specific setting. While individuals may construct violence between men as part of normative gender performances, and as more acceptable compared to violence against women due to perceived vulnerability (Carlson, 2008; Cobbina et al., 2010; Hollander, 2001; Ravn, 2018; Sundaram, 2013), it is possible that these constructs are more pronounced in everyday conversations. Similarly, vignette research—in which gender composition of conflicts has been found to influence bystanders' perceptions and their reported willingness to intervene (e.g., Harris, 1991;

Moule & Powers, 2021)—may overemphasize gender attributes compared to real-life situations, and our findings may, as such, be the result of relying on different sources of data (Baumeister et al., 2007). Future research could potentially replicate this study across various public and semi-public places to gain a broader understanding of intervention across gender compositions in a range of settings.

Further, in situations where help is clearly warranted, the urgency and responsibility to intervene likely prevails, resulting in intervention regardless of gender composition. While individuals may reinforce gendered expectations by protecting women from violence (Hollander, 2001), this may also be achieved—for men in particular—by intervening in violence between men, as this is often constructed as harmful, severe, and as involving high-impact physical violence due to their perceived danger (Hollander, 2001; Sundaram, 2013). Importantly, our study indicates that the *likelihood* of intervention does not differ depending on the gender composition in conflicts, but *how* bystanders intervene may nevertheless differ (Lindegaard et al., 2017). Indeed, it is known from previous research that when bystanders do intervene in mixed-gender conflicts, they offer their support to the woman while targeting the man (Ejbye-Ernst et al., 2022; Rogers et al., 2019). In addition, it is known that men and women intervene in different ways (Lindegaard et al., 2017; Liebst et al., 2019; Van Baak et al., 2024). Further, it is important to mention that we did not consider the dynamics of the conflicts (e.g., who is the aggressor, perceived physical preponderance), while intervention may be more likely in situations where there is a clear man aggressor and woman victim rather than vice versa, as these perceptions may fit social constructs of women's vulnerability and men's dangerousness (Hollander, 2001). Although bystander intervention was widely observed irrespective of gender composition, this does not negate the potential influence of chivalry norms (Felson et al., 2023) on the manner and circumstances under which bystanders intervene in these situations. As such, future research should disentangle how these dynamics may influence the likelihood that bystanders intervene.

Further, we considered whether perceived intimate ties between conflict parties affect the likelihood of bystander intervention. Perceived intimate ties were coded for all conflicts, regardless of gender composition, but were only found in conflicts between men and women. The data do point in the direction of less intervention in perceived intimate conflicts, implying that perceptions of privacy may indeed, in some situations, hinder intervention to some extent compared to other types of conflicts (Rogers et al., 2019; Shotland & Straw, 1976). Both at the situational and individual level, bystander intervention was least common in conflicts between intimates. At the individual level, man-to-woman non-intimate conflicts received

the most intervention (i.e., of all bystanders present, the percentage of intervening bystanders was highest in non-intimate conflicts, meaning they intervened in greater numbers compared to other conflicts). While the differences between intimate and non-intimate conflicts proved not significant at the individual nor the situational level, this could have been the result of our relatively low sample size at the situational level, which can be attributed to the relatively limited amount of conflicts between men and women in natural settings captured on camera. To address this potential power issue, we replicated the situational analyses on a larger sample that was recently collected. In this supplementary analysis, we did not find a significant association between bystander intervention and conflicts between perceived intimate ties, though it approached significance when using a traditional alpha value. Nonetheless, the effect size indicates a non-trivial tendency towards less intervention in conflicts involving men and women perceived to have intimate ties, compared to those between non-intimates. As such, using a larger sample, the evidence is still not conclusive—but the data do point toward some negative effect of perceived intimate ties on the likelihood of intervention.

In addition, we examined whether men and women might differ in their likelihood to intervene in these different types of conflicts. We did not find any interaction effects, and found, in fact, that there was equivalence between men and women in their probability to intervene in man-to-man conflicts versus man-to-woman conflicts. Although men, in particular, may construct women as ‘worthy’ of protection (Ravn, 2018), masculinity may additionally be enacted by intervening in violence between men, which tends to be perceived as more harmful and severe (Hollander, 2001; Sundaram, 2013). Finally, we analyzed whether men and women differed in their likelihood to intervene in perceived intimate conflicts, but, again, we did not find any interaction effects. As such, while men tend to be more likely to intervene in conflicts in public space in general compared to women (Van Baak et al., 2024), the results of the current study suggest that men and women do not differ in terms of the type of conflicts they intervene in. These findings thus offer a more nuanced understanding of helping behavior in public space. Intervention occurred regardless of the gender composition, suggesting that, in real-life situations, disapproval of violence and a desire to help others may exceed gendered expectations in terms of perceived vulnerability and danger. In line with the argument by Walby et al. (2014), it is important to “mainstream” violence by incorporating gendered patterns into violence more generally.

In terms of practical implications, these results suggest that bystanders in real-life conflicts in public space are proactive and tend to protect others. As fear of

violence in public space tends to be particularly prevalent among women (Bondi & Rose, 2003; Gardner, 1995; Rader, 2023), which, in addition to individual factors (e.g., previous victimization), is constructed due to everyday discourse that paints women as vulnerable and men as potentially dangerous (Hollander, 2001), the notion that bystanders generally tend to intervene if such a situation were to occur could potentially be helpful in minimizing such fear. As the data do point in the direction of less intervention in intimate conflicts, intervention programing could focus on recognizing signs of intimate conflicts in public space.

Limitations

There are several important limitations that merit discussion. First, while we are able to analyze what bystanders do in real-life conflicts in public space, we are unable to shed light on the internal mechanisms that may influence these actions. As such, we cannot explain *why* bystanders did or did not decide to intervene in specific situations. Although we controlled for a range of situational factors, we did not consider the interactional processes within conflicts and interventions. While other aspects—such as who initiated the conflict and whether the aggression was one- or two-sided—may affect how bystanders act in these conflicts, it was beyond the scope of our study to include these dynamics. The current study provides insights into the likelihood of intervention across different gender compositions, but future research should unpack these findings by analyzing the situational dynamics and trajectories of these conflicts in relation to bystander intervention.

Further, we relied on observable cues to code perceived intimate ties between conflict parties. While observers have been found to be very accurate in discerning social relationship (Liebst et al., 2023) and we achieved good interrater reliability on this measure, we are unable to verify the existence and dynamics of these ties. Relatedly, we relied on cues of bystanders' and conflict parties' gender presentation, meaning that we are unable to say anything about their self-identification of gender. Although we are unable to draw conclusions about the extent to which self-identified gender influences intervention behavior, it is this gender presentation in public space that other individuals perceive and act upon in public space. Additionally, cues of an intimate relationship are likely perceived similarly by individuals present in the situation.

Further, our sample was largely comprised of man-to-man conflicts, whereas man-to-woman conflicts, both with and without perceived intimate ties, were substantially less common within the data. Note that conflicts between women were unfortunately not included given the lack of sufficient videos reflecting such conflicts

in our dataset. As a result of the relatively low number of man-to-woman conflicts we remain cautious in our interpretation of the findings, especially with regards to the exploratory analyses. While we conducted supplementary analyses on a larger sample to address potential power issues, the results remain somewhat inconclusive. Therefore, replication of this study using a larger sample size at the situational level is important for future research. The limited amount of man-to-woman conflicts in our data is not surprising, as public spaces are primarily populated by men, and conflicts in public space, especially those in night-life related settings, tend to occur predominantly between men (Gardner, 1995; Mooney, 2018). While aggression between men and women also occurs in public space where witnesses are present (Hart & Miethe, 2008; Truman & Morgan, 2014), they are typically more common to occur behind closed doors, especially between those who are partners. Importantly, being in public space provides a unique environment in which individuals perform behaviors in front of an audience (Goffman, 1959), whereas bystanders may act differently when they encounter aggression in non-public settings (i.e., in or around the house). As individuals may adapt their actions based on the perceived interpretation by others in a particular context, the way in which individuals do gender may vary by social situations and circumstances (Messerschmidt, 2000). Therefore, it is important to emphasize that our findings apply to a specific setting, and should be interpreted within the context of a public, urban space in a country from the Global North. It is important to replicate this study in other countries and rural areas, as well as semi-public and private spaces.

Conclusion

Using CCTV footage of real-life conflicts in the Netherlands, we provide insight into the association between gender composition of conflict parties and bystander intervention. Overall, our results imply that intervention is likely across all types of conflicts, and there is no evidence that gender of conflict parties inhibit or encourage bystander intervention in real-life conflicts in public space. While the patterns in the sample point towards less intervention in conflicts between men and women maintaining intimate ties, the differences in intervention in real-life between these versus other conflicts are less pronounced than previously found. As such, our results provide further evidence that individuals who encounter aggression in public are likely to receive help, regardless of their perceived gender.

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Chapter 4

Why do bystanders report intimate partner violence? Insights into real-life reasoning from those who actually intervened

Van Baak, C., Eichelsheim, V., Weenink, D., & Lindegaard, M.R. (2024). Why do bystanders report intimate partner violence? Insights into real-life reasoning from those who actually intervened. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605241227156>

CVB conceptualized the research and methodology, coded the data, conducted the analysis, and wrote the text. VE contributed to conceptualization, data collection, funding acquisition, and reviewing and editing. DW contributed to conceptualization and reviewing and editing. MRL contributed to conceptualization, funding acquisition, and reviewing and editing.

Online supplementary materials: <https://tinyurl.com/4275k4rd>

Abstract

As intimate partner violence (IPV) often remains unknown to police, bystanders can play a crucial role in prevention and further escalation of IPV. However, little is known about what brings them into action by reporting incidents of IPV to authorities. As such, we use statements of bystanders, who filed reports about IPV incidents to an official domestic violence agency in the Netherlands ($N=78$), to investigate the reasoning and motivations for reporting their suspicions. Results show that the reasons for bystanders to report IPV differ depending on the relational dynamics between partners. In situations perceived as *intimate terrorism*, involving a hierarchical abusive relationship between a man offender and a woman victim, bystanders primarily reported when previous helping initiatives proved inefficient, and they did so to prevent further harm, often particularly in relation to the woman victim. In situations perceived as *situational couple violence*, involving a symmetrical abusive relationship, bystanders primarily reported when escalation appeared, and they did so to prevent further harm of involved children. We conclude that bystanders report IPV incidents when the need of help is clear, and their motivation for acting concerns the well-being of victims. Our findings add to the growing body of evidence about real-life bystander intervention in emergencies, and highlight the need for understanding intervention as context-specific in order to design effective intervention initiatives.

Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) often remains undetected by authorities, meaning authorities may need bystanders, such as family members, friends, acquaintances, and neighbors, to become aware and to provide help (McMahon, 2024; Paquin, 1994; Taylor et al., 2019; Wolf et al., 2003). There is an abundance of research suggesting that bystanders tend to intervene in violent encounters in public (Ejbye-Ernst, 2023; Lindegaard et al., 2022; Philpot et al., 2020), and even though IPV tends to occur in “private” settings, there are often bystanders who witness it at some point or otherwise become aware, allowing them to intervene in various ways (Kruttschnitt et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2019; Wilkinson & Hamerschlag, 2005).

Previous research suggests that the approval or disapproval of violence is context-specific, as individuals construct violence by men against women as more unacceptable compared to other gender compositions due to women’s perceived vulnerability and men’s perceived dangerousness, and subsequently, perceived ability to cause harm to women (Carlson, 2008; Hollander, 2001; Ravn, 2018; Sundaram, 2013). In IPV that is perceived as severe, and that involves physical violence as opposed to emotional violence, bystanders tend to report a greater willingness to intervene (Ermer et al., 2021; Gracia et al., 2009; Leon et al., 2022; Taylor & Sorenson, 2005). In addition to more general perceptions of vulnerability and danger – which are associated with perceptions of femininity and masculinity (Hollander, 2001) –, the *dynamics* of the violence between partners may elicit different bystander responses.

According to Johnson (1995, 2011), a distinction can be made between *intimate terrorism*, consisting of the most severe form of violence (Ansara & Hindin, 2010; Ten Boom & Wittebrood, 2019) typically perpetrated by men against women involving a pattern of control and coercion, and *situational couple violence*, which consists of two-sided violence that is situationally provoked.¹ It is possible that bystander intervention, and the reasons for doing so, may differ across these types. Indeed, it is known that IPV involving women as victims – as is typically the case in *intimate terrorism* – is perceived as more serious and urgent, increasing bystanders’ willingness to intervene (Hamby & Jackson, 2010; Harris & Cook, 1994; Kuijpers et al., 2021; Seelau & Seelau, 2005). In contrast, ambiguity or overlap of victim and offender roles – which is typically

1. Johnson has additionally identified violence resistance and mutual violent control as forms of IPV. Violent resistance, which appears to be less common, occurs when victims engage in violence themselves as a response to intimate terrorism. In addition, mutual violent control has been described as a rare pattern in which both partners are violent and controlling (Johnson, 2006). As these two types are typically less common, we limit our focus to intimate terrorism and situational couple violence.

the case in *situational couple violence* – may inhibit bystander intervention (Nicksa, 2014). Further, help-seeking behavior tends to differ across these types, with victims² of *intimate terrorism* being more likely to seek formal help, and victims of *situational couple violence* to rely on their informal network (Leone et al., 2007; Leone et al., 2014). In addition, *intimate terrorism* is typically more covert due to the perpetrator's pattern of control and isolation, whereas *situational couple violence* is likely more visible, which may influence bystanders' awareness, and subsequently, intervention.

Bystander intervention may additionally be influenced by bystanders' own gender and social relationship, with women and individuals with close relationships to the victim showing greater empathy and proactivity in the context of IPV (Casper et al., 2021; Hamby & Jackson, 2010; Harris & Cook, 1994; Kuijpers et al., 2021; Kuskoff & Parsell, 2024; Sylaska & Walters, 2014; West & Wandrei, 2002). Due to the perceived need to protect women from men's violence, men may be more compelled to intervene in *intimate terrorism* as opposed to *situational couple violence*, as violence involving mutual aggression may not fit the expectation of women's perceived vulnerability and men's dangerousness (Hollander, 2001). Yet, as women tend to recognize risky IPV situations earlier (Casper et al., 2021; Hamby & Jackson, 2010; Harris & Cook, 1994; Kuijpers et al., 2021), it is possible that they might be more perceptive of *situational couple violence* compared to men.

While previous studies on bystander intervention in IPV provide information regarding the characteristics surrounding intervention, these studies are predominantly based on scenario-based assessments of potential bystanders, and, as such, hypothetical in nature rather than centered on real-life situations (e.g., Kuijpers et al., 2021; Sylaska & Walters, 2014). Importantly, Sánchez-Prada and colleagues (2022) found that a substantial gap exists between bystanders' reported hypothetical actions in IPV and their *actual* behavior, with bystanders vastly overestimating their hypothetical involvement. According to Kuskoff and Parsell (2024), it is necessary to use other rich data sources that allow for a nuanced and comprehensive overview of bystander intervention in IPV (e.g., administrative data). This highlights the need to understand the motivations and reasons that bring bystanders into action by reporting incidents of IPV in real-life situations, including potential differences between *intimate terrorism* and *situational couple violence*.

2. We acknowledge that the word 'victim' may not adequately capture the agency, resilience and empowerment of individuals who experience IPV (Proffitt, 1996). For readability and consistency, we will refer to individuals who experience IPV as 'victim', but we would like to emphasize that we acknowledge their agency, resilience and empowerment.

To fill this gap, we analyze the statements of bystanders who reported incidents of IPV ($N=78$) to *Safe at Home [Veilig Thuis]*, a national authority for domestic violence in the Netherlands. *Safe at Home* provides a helpline where individuals can seek help or report domestic violence, and is responsible for assessing individuals' safety and taking precautions (e.g., arranging emergency shelter). By examining these real-life accounts of bystander intervention, we gain valuable insights into their motivations and reasons for reporting. These bystander perspectives on helping behavior are rare and potentially valuable for designing better intervention programs targeting bystanders (Latta & Goodman, 2011). Our findings add to existing video-observational studies that capture actual bystander behavior in real-life emergencies but do not delve into their underlying motivations (e.g., Ejbye-Ernst, 2023; Philpot et al., 2020). We first present an overview of the literature, in which we discuss (a) who intervenes in IPV, and (b) why they do so.

Who intervenes in IPV?

Previous research indicates that if and how individuals intervene depends on the context, with some differences in intervention behavior between men and women. Studies have found that men tend to be more likely to engage in strength-intensive and direct forms of helping, such as physical intervention in public violence (Liebst et al., 2019; Van Baak et al., 2024), while women are more likely to engage in communal and indirect forms of helping behavior, including consolation of victims in the aftermath of robberies (Lindegaard et al., 2017) and reporting child abuse to a hotline (Hoefnagels & Zwikker, 2007). Previous vignette and survey studies suggest that women report a greater inclination to intervene in IPV compared to men, in particular when considering indirect forms of intervention (e.g., calling the police rather than confronting a perpetrator) (Banyard et al., 2020; Bennett et al., 2017; Berkowitz et al., 2022; Casper et al., 2021; Harris & Cook, 1994; Katz & Nguyen, 2016; Sylaska & Walters, 2014; West & Wandrei, 2002). In addition, women tend to perceive IPV as more severe, attribute greater responsibility to the perpetrator, and recognize risky situations earlier compared to men (Casper et al., 2021; Hamby & Jackson, 2010; Harris & Cook, 1994; Gracia et al., 2009; Kuijpers et al., 2021). In sum, women may detect abusive relationships earlier than men, and empathize more readily with the victims.

Further, studies suggest that bystanders are more likely to intervene in IPV when they have a personal connection or social bond with the individuals involved (Casper et al., 2021; Ermer et al., 2021; Palmer et al., 2018), such as friends and family (Kuskoff & Parsell, 2024; Weitzman et al., 2020). When bystanders feel a close connection with

the victim, they tend to experience a sense of similarity and responsibility for their well-being (Levine et al., 2005; Nicksa, 2014), which includes the responsibility to intervene in IPV (Kuskoff & Parsell, 2024). Further, it has been found that friends and family are more likely to be aware of IPV compared to acquaintances or strangers (Kuskoff & Parsell, 2024). Friends and family typically become aware of IPV through personal disclosure from the victims (Edwards et al., 2012), while neighbors may be aware due to their physical proximity (Nardi- Rodríguez et al, 2022; Paquin, 1994).

While these characteristics may explain some of the variation in bystanders' willingness to report, the decision to report IPV additionally appears to be influenced by situational aspects, including perceived severity, relationship dynamics, the form of violence, and the responsibility that bystanders attribute to the perpetrator (Leon et al., 2022). For example, bystanders indicate they would be more likely to report abuse that is perceived as more severe (Ermer et al., 2021; Gracia et al., 2009), and that entails physical or sexual violence as opposed to emotional violence (Taylor & Sorenson, 2005). Importantly, these factors may also be related to the dynamics of the abuse. While *intimate terrorism* is typically more severe, it also tends to be a more covert form of IPV, and as such, may be less visible to bystanders compared to *situational couple violence*. Although previous vignette and survey studies suggest that women and those with a close relationship with the victim indicate the greatest *willingness* to intervene in IPV, less is known about bystanders who report real-life cases of IPV, why they might do so, and if this depends on whether the situation is perceived as *intimate terrorism* or *situational couple violence*.

Why do bystanders intervene in IPV?

Previous studies suggest that intervention in IPV is driven by bystanders' concern for the victim (Casper et al., 2021; Walker et al., 2021). Survey research among intervening bystanders indicates that they felt responsible, recognized the behavior as problematic, and empathized with the victim (Walker et al., 2021). Casper and colleagues (2021) similarly found that general concern and universal ethical principles were important motivations to intervene in IPV. As such, the primary motivation for reporting IPV is likely related to the protection of those who are physically and/or emotionally harmed by IPV (i.e., the victim and children present in the home). Bystanders may also have specific individual or situational reasons to intervene, such as personal experience with IPV that makes them recognize the need of help more easily (Casper et al., 2021; Walker et al., 2021), or perceived escalation of abuse (Fraga Dominguez et al., 2021). Yet, the motivation (e.g., general concern) and the specific

situational reasons to intervene (e.g., escalation) may differ between situations perceived as *intimate terrorism* and *situational couple violence*.

Previous scenario-based studies found that bystanders indicated variation in their reasons to intervene in IPV depending on the nature of the relationship between partners. In IPV perpetrated asymmetrically by a man offender against a woman victim, bystanders expressed more willingness to intervene compared to situations involving mutual violence in symmetrical abusive relationships (Berkowitz et al., 2022; Walker et al., 2021). Importantly, the extent to which violence is perceived as legitimate or illegitimate depends on its context (Ravn, 2018). Previous studies have found that individuals constructed violence by men against women as unacceptable, and depicted women as vulnerable and ‘worthy’ of protection, which was attributed to the perceived danger of men’s physical body and the perceived ability to cause harm to women (Carlson, 2008; Hollander, 2001; Ravn, 2018; Sundaram, 2013). As such, associations of femininity with perceived vulnerability, and masculinity with perceived dangerousness (Hollander, 2001), may affect how individuals perceive and act upon IPV. Yet, violence between men and women, in the context of IPV, is not only perceived differently due to perceptions of femininity and masculinity, but also appears to underlie different relationship dynamics. Whereas *intimate terrorism*, predominantly perpetrated by men against women involves control and coercion, in which misogyny and gender traditionalism play a role (Johnson, 1995; 2011), *situational couple violence* includes two-sided violence that is situationally provoked as a result of poor conflict management. In addition to strong disapproval of men’s violence against women due to perceptions of femininity and masculinity, bystanders might be more willing to act when witnessing *intimate terrorism* compared to *situational couple violence* because the violence tends to be more severe, more often repeated and involves a classical “innocent” victim that bystanders may want to protect from harm. As such, the need of help might be clearer to the bystanders. Yet, while victims of *intimate terrorism* are attacked more frequently, and are more likely to be injured, this form of IPV also tends to be more covert due to the perpetrator’s pattern of control and isolation of the victim (Johnson & Leone, 2005; Leone et al., 2014). As victim and offender roles are much more ambiguous in *situational couple violence*, this could result in a more nebulous perception of whom bystanders empathize with and whom they need to protect from harm. On the other hand, victims of *situational couple violence*, which stems from the way partners manage conflict and is influenced by interpersonal dynamics and conflict management skills (Johnson, 2008; Love et al., 2020), are more likely to rely on *informal* help (e.g., contacting family or friends; Leone et al., 2007; Leone et al., 2014), and this form of IPV tends to be more overt,

which could alternatively result in greater awareness among bystanders compared to *intimate terrorism*.

In this paper, we examine why bystanders report IPV in general, as well as their reasons for reporting *intimate terrorism* and *situational couple violence*. We expect that in situations perceived as *intimate terrorism*, victimization may be less visible to bystanders due to the perpetrator's control of the victim, there may be more severe escalations, and formal help might be more often involved. In situations perceived as *situational couple violence*, we expect that bystanders may be more likely to be aware of the violence due to its overtness. However, due to the reciprocal nature of this form of IPV, they may only report when they receive clear signs that one or both of the partners are harmed or in danger (e.g., recent disclosure, escalated abuse).

Data

We used data from *Safe at Home [Veilig Thuis]*, the official domestic violence agency in the Netherlands, consisting of 25 regional agencies. *Safe at Home* offers a free national helpline available 24 hours a day for individuals seeking advice or help regarding domestic violence. In addition, individuals, such as victims, professionals, and bystanders, can use the helpline to report suspicions of domestic violence.³ *Safe at Home* uses a structured and validated assessment procedure to evaluate the safety of all individuals involved, including victims and perpetrators, as well as individuals exposed to domestic violence (e.g., children, other family members). Based on this assessment, *Safe at Home* may refer the case to specialized care (e.g., social work), arrange emergency shelter, or start an in-depth investigation (e.g., contact the parties involved, request information from other agencies). Depending on this investigation, *Safe at Home* may also decide to alert child protection agencies or the police. All reported situations, regardless of the outcome, are registered as case files. Bystanders who report their suspicions also have the option to report anonymously, meaning that their information – or any other information that might be traceable to the individual – will not be disclosed.⁴

3. In the Netherlands, professionals working in health care, education, day care, social support, youth care, and the criminal justice system have a legal duty to report suspicions of domestic violence to Safe at Home ('Wet verplichte meldcode huiselijk geweld').

4. In these cases, *Safe at Home* registers the relationship between the bystander and the individuals they report about, their contact information, and typically the reason to report anonymously, but will not communicate this information – or any other information that might be traceable to the bystander – to the individuals reported about.

Sample selection

Data were collected from case files in one *Safe at Home* region from April to October 2021. The region, consisting of one of the twelve provinces of the Netherlands, comprises both urban and rural areas, with an overall population density similar to the national average.

The data collection was part of a larger project looking at the prevalence, severity, and type of domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic (see Coomans et al., 2023). For the purpose of the current study, we included all reports that *Safe at Home* categorized as ‘intimate partner violence’⁵ that were reported between January 2019 and December 2020, and that were reported by bystanders. A bystander was defined as a non-professional individual who called *Safe at Home* to report a suspicion of IPV. Reports from professionals who have a legal duty to report suspicions of domestic violence to *Safe at Home* (e.g., police), and reports made by individuals directly involved in the situation (i.e., perpetrator, victim, or child) were not included in the sample.⁶

In total, there were 126 cases categorized as IPV, in which at least one report had been made by a bystander. These 126 cases included 259 reports. Of these cases, 41 cases, involving 168 reports, were excluded from the sample, because they were reported by an involved individual (i.e. perpetrator, victim, or child) or by a professional, the case was deleted at the request of the family, and/or the specific report was not categorized as IPV by *Safe at Home*.⁷ Six reports were later excluded because *Safe at Home* concluded that these were the result of false accusations resulting from ongoing conflicts between the bystander and the involved family (e.g., neighborhood quarrel).

5. *Safe at Home* classifies reported situations based on their presumptive nature of domestic violence, and registers them as ‘intimate partner violence’, ‘child maltreatment’, ‘violence against parents’, ‘violence against the elderly’, and ‘other problems’. As multiple forms of domestic violence can co-occur, it is possible that multiple categories are assigned. If multiple categories were assigned, they were recoded into one category by letting one category prevail above another in the following order: (1) Child maltreatment and intimate partner violence, (2) Child maltreatment, (3) Intimate partner violence, (4) Violence against parents, (5) Violence against the elderly, and (6) Other problems. Multiple reports can be made within one case, and are all registered as individual reports within the same case ID number. For the current study, we analyzed all reports that were coded as intimate partner violence (i.e., category 1 or 3).
6. As case files were registered in the system based on their unique case ID, and reports do not receive a unique ID number, we went through all cases in which at least one report was categorized as ‘intimate partner violence’. Cases can include multiple reports, meaning it was possible that not all reports within one case met our inclusion criteria. For example, within one case not every report may have been classified as ‘intimate partner violence’, or the report might have been filed by a professional.
7. These exclusion criteria are not mutually exclusive. Among the 168 reports that were excluded from the sample, multiple exclusion criteria often applied. For this reason, these numbers exceed 168.

Reports without evidence of unsafety or violence were not excluded if there was no evidence that these reports were intentionally false. Further, we decided to exclude reports in which bystanders suspected the violence was perpetrated by a woman partner ($n=7$ reports). The nature of abuse was unclear from these descriptions, and given the small subsample of these reports, we were unable to conduct a thorough analysis of these cases. This resulted in a final sample of $N=78$ reports within 72 cases, including six cases with multiple individual bystander reports. An overview of this process can be found in Appendix E or in the supplementary material.

Methods

Data were accessible through the organizational system of *Safe at Home* and was transcribed and/or copied into Excel by the first author and two researchers. Extensive information from the case files was included, including the full report as filed by the bystander, which entailed information about the type, duration and severity according to the bystander. Bystanders were also asked how they became aware of the incident or suspicion, why they chose to report, and their expectations from *Safe at Home*. Other coded information included demographic details, statements by victims, offenders and involved parties, investigation-related information, and data from other agencies. Any identifying information was removed to protect confidentiality. The coded data were then imported into Atlas.ti version 9 for analysis.

Analytical strategy

We conducted a qualitative thematic analysis to examine the motivations and reasons bystanders provide for reporting their suspicions of IPV to a national domestic violence agency. Specifically, we analyzed this across situations that were perceived by bystanders as *intimate terrorism* or *situational couple violence*. For the thematic analysis, we used a combination of a deductive and inductive approach (Clarke & Braun, 2017), drawing on anticipated themes from previous literature and the first author's extensive coding process at *Safe at Home*. An overview of our qualitative process can be found in Appendix F or in the supplementary material.

The deductive approach was based on the first author's familiarity with the case files and relevant literature on bystander reporting and bystander intervention in IPV. We identified potential themes previously associated with motivating bystanders or serving as specific reasons for intervention, including 'benevolence', 'safety', 'personal experience', and 'escalation' (Casper et al., 2021; Fraga Dominguez et al., 2021; Walker et al., 2021), and used this to establish an initial coding scheme. The coding scheme also included categories – previously categorized by *Safe at Home* – for 'type of bystander' (i.e., family member, social network, neighbor) and 'gender of

bystander' (i.e., man or woman).⁸ Additionally, we established descriptive codes to provide context, such as how the bystander became aware (i.e., direct signs of IPV, disclosure from victim/perpetrator, or informed by others) and the form of violence (i.e., emotional, physical, sexual, financial) as reported by the bystander.

For the type of IPV, we made a distinction between *intimate terrorism* and *situational couple violence* (Johnson, 1995, 2011) based on the interpretation of bystanders' descriptions. Instances of suspected one-sided violence perpetrated by a man partner against a woman victim were coded as *intimate terrorism*. An example of *intimate terrorism*, as cited by the employee who summarized the bystander's observations, includes: "There is structural domestic violence, which is witnessed by their children. [Man] is making death threats against [woman] and threatens to throw acid in her face and to beat her on her recently operated chest/arm until she bleeds. [...] [Man] wakes up [woman] in the night by yelling/screaming, then nothing happens (sounds like a form of intimate terrorism). Whenever [man] wants to have sex, she has to obey, if she says no, he threatens her." In these situations, bystanders sometimes explicitly mentioned the victim's vulnerability or the power imbalance within the relationship, such as: "[b]ystanders are worried because [woman] is insufficiently resilient to her ex-partner." Cases where bystanders perceived two-sided abuse were coded as *situational couple violence*. In these reports, bystanders sometimes explicitly mentioned that they perceived both partners as perpetrators, but oftentimes bystanders reported that they had heard or seen both partners engage in emotionally or physically abusive behavior, without labeling a perpetrator. An example includes: "[Bystander] says she hears the neighbors frequently yelling, cursing and threatening each other. [...] [Bystander] says she has seen the neighbors throwing things at each other, such as crockery." It is important to emphasize that this indicates bystanders' *perceptions* of IPV, while the detailed dynamics between the partners remain unknown. As such, it could be possible that violence is perceived as two-sided by bystanders, but in fact considers violent response to *intimate terrorism*, or that IPV by a man against a woman does not include coercion and control consistent with *intimate terrorism*. Note that, with the exception of one case, all bystanders suspected a pattern of violence based on the signs they received (e.g., seeing or hearing it) (98.7%), and rarely reported suspicions based on an isolated incident. Further, because we are interested in bystanders' *perspectives*, we believe focusing on their statements, based on the signs they receive, is crucial.

8. We acknowledge that gender does not consist of a binary, and individuals identify with gender identities that do not fit this distinction. To this extent, our measure does not do justice to the fluidity of gender as well as non-binary individuals. Because we do not know how bystanders self-identified in terms of gender, the operationalization of gender in the current study reflects gender perception more so than gender identity.

After creating the coding scheme, the first author independently coded 20 reports, using the initial coding scheme as a basis but also considering any other relevant information (i.e., information that was not anticipated but nevertheless provided further context, such as bystanders' earlier intervention actions). Simultaneously, another researcher, who was involved in the coding process at *Safe at Home*, independently coded 20 reports without access to the initial coding scheme. This researcher was aware of the research questions, but was not given the coding scheme to allow them to work as independently as possible. The coded reports were then compared, and both coders discussed their codes in greater detail. As both coders participated in the initial coding process, and many of the codes were descriptive, there was substantial overlap in the codes. Any discrepancies were thoroughly discussed until a consensus was reached. All information was combined into one coding scheme, serving as the starting point for coding in Atlas.ti.

The first author conducted multiple cycles of coding, with a focus on bystanders' reports and their reasons for reporting. During the first cycle, relevant sentences of bystanders' reports were coded using the coding scheme, and extensive analytic memos were written. These memos included general impressions and reflections on individual reports, serving as an important tool for data analysis throughout the coding process. An example of an insight resulting from the memos was that bystanders often found it difficult to report, and experienced a range of conflicting emotions. Such insights were valuable because they provided a greater understanding of bystanders' experiences. Once all case files were coded, a detailed analysis was conducted, and the codes were reviewed and refined. In the second cycle of coding, all case files were coded again with the refined codes. Any additional themes that emerged and were not covered by the coding scheme were coded as open codes, capturing as many themes and patterns as possible (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These inductively derived open codes consisted of relevant information that contextualized the themes related to reporting. The coding process continued until we reached saturation (i.e., no new themes or codes emerged from the data), and the themes were then defined and named. In the section below, we present these themes by discussing who reported IPV and their reasoning and motivation for reporting across types of IPV. We present numbers and percentages when they are useful in describing and understanding our sample, but refer to Appendix G for further detail about the sample.

Results

In slightly over half of the reports ($n=44$; 56.4%), the bystander suspected that the violence was perpetrated by a man partner against a woman victim, which was consistent with the concept of *intimate terrorism*. In over 40% of the reports ($n=34$), bystanders suspected that both partners engaged in violence, which was perceived as *situational couple violence*. Since we do not have data about the prevalence of each type within the Netherlands, and how often bystanders are aware but do not report, potential reporting differences remain unknown. Yet, while situations involving women as victims have been found to increase bystanders' willingness to intervene (Hamby & Jackson, 2010; Kuijpers et al., 2021), and ambiguity of victim and offender roles – as might be the case in *situational couple violence* – could inhibit intervention, both types of IPV were reported.

Who reported IPV?

The majority of all reports were filed by women (64.1%). Slightly over a quarter of all reports were filed by men, whereas the remaining reports were either filed by both a man and a woman (e.g., a couple) or bystander's gender was not reported. Contrary to what was expected, the types of IPV that were reported were roughly equally distributed among men and women, suggesting that both types of IPV are perceived by men and women as severe enough to be reported. Across both types of IPV, most bystanders suspected emotional violence, followed by physical violence, which were often reported simultaneously, but rarely mentioned that they suspected financial abuse or sexual violence. Further, with the exception of one report, bystanders mentioned that their suspicions referred to a pattern of IPV as opposed to an isolated incident. Bystanders who reported were most often neighbors who, likely as a result of their close proximity, received direct signs of IPV (i.e., hearing or seeing), suggesting that neighbors have an important role in signaling IPV. An overview of all reports is presented in Appendix C in the supplementary material.

We identified specific themes within each type of IPV, as visualized in Figures 1 and 2. Reports in which *intimate terrorism* was suspected were made at relatively equal rates by men (57.1%) and women (56.0%), who often suspected both physical and emotional IPV in *intimate terrorism*. However, women more often reported their suspicions if they only suspected emotional IPV, which was less often reported by men. In addition, while neighbors were the most frequent reporters in both types of IPV, reports were also made by family members – mostly women – who received disclosure from the victim.

Situational couple violence was reported at relatively equal rates by men (42.9%) as by women (44.0%), who often reported both physical and emotional IPV, though women suspected physical IPV less often. Neighbors were by far the most common bystanders to report *situational couple violence*, who often also mentioned experiencing nuisance, such as noise disturbance. This may not only be the result of their close proximity, but potentially also due to the co-occurrence of IPV with other problems, which we elaborate later on. While family members were common bystanders to report *intimate terrorism*, this was substantially less common among reports involving *situational couple violence*. Although previous research suggests that victims of *situational couple violence* are more likely to rely on their informal network (Leone et al., 2007; Leone et al., 2014), bystanders who reported this type of IPV rarely received disclosure from partners.

What were the motivations for reporting?

In all reports, it became clear that bystanders reported out of concern for others. These concerns related to the well-being of the family as a whole or of the victim or the children specifically. While bystanders often explicitly mentioned they wanted to prevent further harm, the perceptions of *whom* they believed should be protected differed.

In reports perceived as *intimate terrorism*, bystanders often mentioned concerns regarding the well-being of the woman victim, sometimes in combination with concerns about children in the household. As visualized in Figure 1, these concerns sometimes related specifically to perceptions of women's vulnerability, which may not only have to do with the association of femininity with perceived vulnerability in the context of violence (Hollander, 2001), but also with the dynamics of intimate terrorism consisting of severe, repeated abuse co-occurring with coercion and control against the victim (Johnson, 2011). For example, in one report, it was stated that "[b]ystanders are worried because [woman] is insufficiently resilient to her ex-partner." Importantly, the concerns about the well-being of the woman as a victim sometimes included the fear that the abuse could potentially result in the woman's severe injury or death. An example includes: "[Bystander] is afraid that it will escalate. That he will actually throw boiling water on her or hurt her physically. In addition, [bystander] is afraid that the child will become victimized if the conflict escalates." These concerns not only had to do with suspicions of intimate terrorism as a pattern of severe abuse, of which injury or harm could be a potential outcome, but was sometimes also based on having seen the woman's injuries. For some bystanders, these concerns resulted in feelings of stress and/or guilt related to feeling responsible for the woman's, and sometimes the children's, well-being.

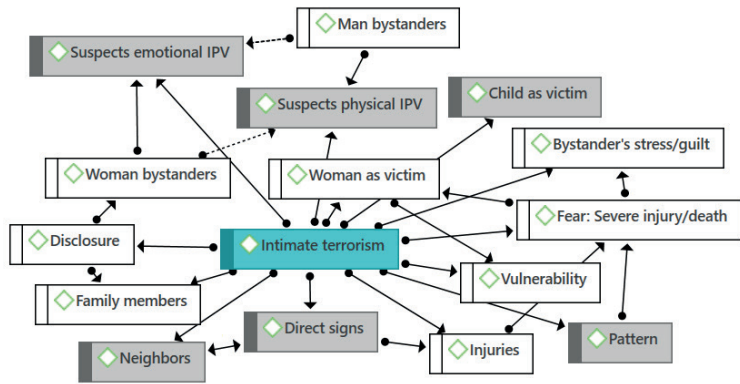


Figure 1. Overview of identified themes in reports perceived as intimate terrorism

Note. Boxes in grey color reflect themes that were prevalent across both types, whereas boxes without color refer to themes that were especially common in reports of perceived *intimate terrorism*. Dashed lines (see ‘man bystanders’ and ‘woman bystanders’) indicate that while these codes were identified, they were less common (i.e., man bystanders suspected emotional IPV but less often compared to women, woman bystanders suspected physical IPV but less often compared to men).

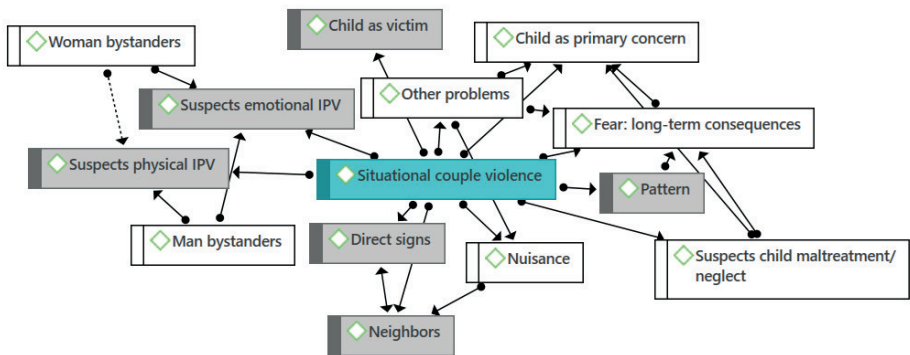


Figure 2. Overview of identified themes in reports perceived as situational couple violence

Note. Boxes in grey color reflect themes that were prevalent across both types, whereas boxes without color refer to themes that were especially common in reports of perceived *situational couple violence*. Dashed lines (see ‘woman bystanders’) indicate that while these codes were identified, they were less common (i.e., woman bystanders suspected physical IPV but less often compared to men).

In reports reflecting *situational couple violence*, the primary motivation to report was often related to concerns about the well-being of children. As visualized in Figure 2, bystanders often reported that they suspected other problems in addition to IPV, such as substance use, mental health problems, financial issues, or dilapidation of the house, which sometimes (additionally) resulted in bystanders experiencing nuisance (e.g., noise disturbance). In addition, it was not uncommon for bystanders to mention suspicions of child maltreatment or neglect. In many cases, it seemed to be a combination of IPV –which may have been witnessed by children–, potential child maltreatment or neglect, and other issues within the household, that led to bystanders' concern about the children being exposed to an unsafe environment. While bystanders also reported concerns regarding children's immediate safety, there was a particular fear related to long-term consequences as a result of children growing up in this environment. An example of a report in which the children's well-being is centered is illustrated here: “[Bystander’s] biggest concern if nothing is being done is that the children grow up in an unsafe environment and that they will not grow up as well-balanced adults. [Bystander] is also concerned that the children witness violence between their parents, and, as a result, are being neglected. Based on what [bystander] hears, the situation is very intense, and the exposure to the screaming and escalation is not good for the children. [Bystander] wants the children to grow up in a pleasant environment.”

To summarize, all reports reflected concerns about others' well-being, but in *intimate terrorism* bystanders were – in addition to concerns about children's well-being – afraid that the woman victim would be (severely) harmed, who was identified as a clear victim that they believed should be protected. In *situational couple violence*, these concerns often primarily related to the children.

What were the reasons to report?

In addition, we analyzed the reasons that served as a turning point for bystanders to report their suspicions. Bystanders often had multiple reasons, meaning these reasons were not mutually exclusive. In total, we identified and categorized eight reasons. An overview of these reasons, and how they emerged across cases of *intimate terrorism* and *situational couple violence*, is presented in Table 1. Further, we present a visualization of overlapping reasons for each type in Figure 3 and Figure 4.

Table 1. Reasons to report and perceived type of intimate partner violence (IPV)

Reason	Intimate terrorism (n=44)	Situational couple violence (n=34)
Ineffectiveness of previous help	26	11
Recent escalation	18	14
Continued unsafety	8	7
Disturbance	2	10
Lack of sight	4	3
“No one does anything”	5	0
Advised to report	2	2
Personal experience	0	2

Note. Multiple reasons may co-exist, meaning these numbers are not mutually exclusive.

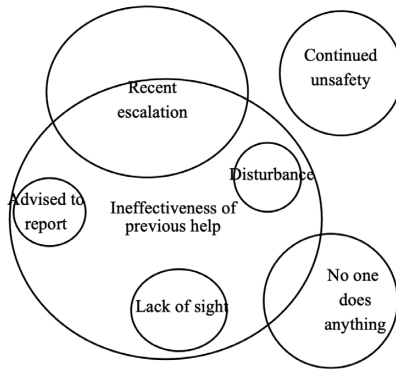


Figure 3. Overview of bystanders' reasons to report suspicions of intimate terrorism.

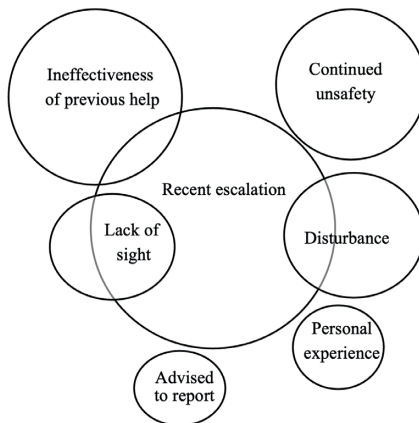


Figure 4. Overview of bystanders' reasons to report suspicions of situational couple violence.

Ineffectiveness of previous help. The most common reason for bystanders to report, for both men and women, was feeling it was their last resort to intervene and provide help. Bystanders were often aware of the violence for quite some time, and had sometimes engaged in previous acts of intervention (e.g., calling the police). Instead of an isolated action, bystander intervention often appeared to be a continuous effort. In other instances, bystanders had not engaged in previous actions, but were aware that other bystanders or professionals had previously been involved. The turning point to report often came when bystanders realized previous efforts to break the patterns of abuse were ineffective, seeing reporting as their last chance to help. This is exemplified in the following statement: “[Bystander] reports that the situation has been going on for three months. [Bystander] has repeatedly called the police. [Bystander] has approached her neighbor and her partner, but the situation does not change.” This reason was particularly prevalent in reports of *intimate terrorism*.

Recent escalation. The second most common reason to report, for both men and women, was a recent escalation. These bystanders witnessed or became aware of a violent incident that was perceived as one of increased severity. Although bystanders were often aware of a pattern of IPV, it was this recent escalation that served as a turning point. In the following example, the bystander, the victim’s mother, decided to report after her daughter got severely injured as a result of physical violence: “[Bystander] believes the violence is getting worse. [...] [Bystander] reports that they had to cancel their vacation to return home. [Her daughter] was hospitalized with a severe eye injury. [...] [Bystander] is afraid [her daughter] might not survive if the violence does not end.” *Recent escalation* was common across both types of IPV, but proved to be the most common reason to report in *situational couple violence*. In *intimate terrorism*, recent escalation regularly co-occurred with the ineffectiveness of previous help, emphasizing the need for effective help to prevent further escalation.

Continued unsafety. Some bystanders, mostly men, did not identify a specific turning point, but expressed their concerns about the persistent suspicion of IPV, leading to a sense of continued unsafety within the household. These suspicions were often on-going for a while, and there were no clear indicators that the IPV became more severe. Yet, these bystanders seemed to have realized that repeated exposure to violence and/or unsafety could result in negative long-term consequences. Bystanders particularly reported this in relation to children in the home, whom they suspected witnessed or experienced violence, and often mentioned fears related to the children’s development. *Continued unsafety* occurred in relative numbers mostly in cases of *situational couple violence*, which can be related to bystanders’ fear of the lasting effects for children.

Disturbance. Some bystanders specifically mentioned that they experienced disturbance from the IPV (e.g., noise, nuisance), and ending this disturbance was part of their reasoning to report. While disturbance is a more self-centered reason to report, this was never the sole reason to report, and was always expressed in combination with other concerns. An example of this is the following: “[Bystander] says that he is disturbed by the fights, and cannot sleep, which negatively impacts his job. [...] [Bystander] wants the noise disturbance to end.” Not surprisingly, this reason was primarily indicated by neighbors, who experienced disturbance as a result of their close spatial proximity, and were often repeatedly exposed to noise. In addition, this reason was more common among men. *Disturbance* was predominantly prevalent in cases of *situational couple violence*, and often co-occurred with a recent escalation, which could be the result of the overtness and mutuality of escalation as a form of communication between partners.

Lack of sight. Some bystanders decided to report their suspicions because they did no longer have sight on the partner(s), and as such, were concerned about their safety. This was reported by women and by a dyad consisting of a man and woman. In the following statement, an example is provided: “[Bystander] reports that she received a Facebook message on [date] from [woman] saying she is afraid of her partner [man] and wants to leave him. [Bystander] says she has now been blocked on Facebook and cannot get in contact with [woman].” This reason was reported equally across both forms of IPV, and often co-occurred with ineffectiveness of previous help (in *intimate terrorism*) or with a recent escalation (in *situational couple violence*).

“No one does anything”. Another reason to report was bystanders’ realization that other individuals who were aware of IPV did not intervene. Contrary to *ineffectiveness of previous help*, where individuals and/or helping agencies were involved but perceived as ineffective, bystanders mentioned that others who were aware remained passive, and as such, they felt responsible. This is exemplified in the following statement: “[Bystander] finds it difficult to report, but everybody knows, and no one does anything.” This factor predominantly played a role in reports made by women, and was mostly mentioned in cases of *intimate terrorism*.

Advised to report. A specific turning point that became apparent in several reports – across both types of IPV – was the fact that bystanders were advised to report to *Safe at Home* by an external agency or organization (e.g., Victim Support, the police). In reports of *intimate terrorism*, this reason overlapped with *ineffectiveness of previous help*, as agencies likely refer to *Safe at Home* because this is the official agency responsible for coordinating help.

Personal experience. Two women, who reported instances of *situational couple violence*, shared that they had experienced domestic violence in their family of origin. These experiences influenced their ability to recognize the signs and resulted in a sense of responsibility. For example, one bystander mentioned that she and her sister had experienced physical and emotional abuse from their parents during their childhood. The bystander reported that her sister and partner abused each other in front of their children, and were additionally abusive towards their children, who were her primary concern. As a result of her lived experience, she recognized the children's fear, having gone through this herself. This is in line with previous research suggesting that first-hand knowledge due to past experiences may motivate bystander intervention in IPV (Kuskoff & Parsell, 2024).

To summarize, bystanders had various, often co-existing, reasons to report their suspicions. In situations that reflect *intimate terrorism*, *ineffectiveness of previous help* was by far the most common reason to report, which could potentially be explained by the fact that this type of IPV is more likely to receive formal help (Johnson, 2011; Leone et al., 2007). At the same time, this type of IPV may be particularly difficult to terminate given the pattern of severe abuse and control. In *situational couple violence*, bystanders often reported because of *recent escalation*. It is possible that the violence is initially perceived as less severe because bystanders suspect that both partners engage in violence, until an escalation clarifies the severity. The reasons for reporting were generally similar among men and women, although men were more likely to report due to *continued unsafety*, which can be related to concerns about lasting effects to children.

Discussion

Using a qualitative approach, we analyzed statements of bystanders who reported their suspicions of IPV to a domestic violence helpline in the Netherlands. By offering practical and theoretical insights into real-life cases of IPV, we provide rare insights into bystander perspectives on intervention. Our findings complement existing video-based observations indicating that bystanders intervene but not why they do so (e.g., Ejbye-Ernst, 2023; Philpot et al., 2020). Understanding the willingness, motivations, and reasons behind bystander reporting is crucial in recognizing their valuable role in the de-escalation of IPV.

We found that roughly two-thirds of bystanders who reported suspicions of IPV were women, suggesting that women may perceive IPV as more severe and recognize risky situations earlier compared to men, potentially due to their increased exposure

(Casper et al., 2021; Hamby & Jackson, 2010; Harris & Cook, 1994; Kuijpers et al., 2021). Further, women, in particular family members, more often received disclosure from the victim, especially in cases perceived as *intimate terrorism*, whereas men mostly reported after direct signs of IPV. These findings contribute to the growing understanding that men and women might perform different roles in intervention trajectories (Liebst et al., 2019; Lindegaard et al., 2017; Van Baak et al., 2024).

We did not find major gender differences in the types of IPV that were reported by men and women. In relative numbers, men and women bystanders reported *intimate terrorism* and *situational couple violence* at similar rates, suggesting that men and women bystanders may report cases of IPV regardless of whom they perceive as the victim. Yet, women more frequently reported cases involving (only) emotional violence, while men tended to report instances of physical violence. This suggests that women might be more perceptive of emotional abuse, possibly due to their proximity and their ability to recognize abuse at lower thresholds (Fledderjohann & Johnson, 2012; Hoefnagels & Zwikker, 2007).

Most reports were filed by neighbors, highlighting their importance in providing informal social control in the context of IPV – a role that has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic (Coomans et al., 2023). Due to their proximity, neighbors often directly witnessed IPV, which may increase their confidence to intervene and reduces the ambiguity of the situation (Nardi-Rodríguez et al., 2022; Nicksa, 2014). As neighbors can serve as crucial sources of early recognition of IPV, and, as such, can help to terminate or de-escalate IPV, it is essential to consider neighbors' perspectives and needs related to intervention. Future studies could conduct focus groups among both neighbors who have and who have *not* intervened in IPV, to gain further insight into their decision-making processes and to identify how their emotional and practical needs could potentially be included in policy efforts.

In slightly over half of the reported cases, bystanders reported situations consistent with *intimate terrorism* perpetrated by a man partner against a woman victim, suggesting that bystanders perceive both forms of IPV as severe enough to report, regardless of the perceived perpetrator. All bystanders who reported IPV did so out of concern for others' well-being and to prevent further harm, suggesting that their helping behavior is motivated by empathy and benevolence. Yet, the perception of *who* needs help and protection differed. In *intimate terrorism*, bystanders expressed concerns related to the woman victim in particular, sometimes co-existing with concerns about children. In these situations, bystanders identified a clear victim that they believed should be protected from further harm, occasionally expressing

concerns about the risk of women's severe injury or death. An important theme that emerged in reports reflecting *intimate terrorism* related to women's perceived vulnerability. More generally, studies have found that individuals construct violence by men against women as particularly unacceptable due to perceptions of women's vulnerability and men's perceived ability to cause harm to women (Carlson, 2008; Hollander, 2001; Ravn, 2018; Sundaram, 2013). Yet, this vulnerability can also be attributed to the nature of *intimate terrorism* typically consisting of perpetrator's severe abuse and control against the victim, most often a woman, in which severe harm is not uncommon (Johnson, 2011). In *situational couple violence*, bystanders prioritized the protection of children, and often expressed concerns about negative long-term consequences. The overlap in victim and offender roles in *situational couple violence* may make it harder for bystanders to identify who needs help, whereas children are eminently vulnerable victims in an unsafe environment. Further, in many reports reflecting *situational couple violence* bystanders reported a range of other concerns, such as substance use, and child maltreatment or neglect in addition to IPV, which arguably increases bystanders' concerns about children's well-being.

Bystanders reported their suspicions for various reasons, which often overlapped, with the most common reason being the perceived *ineffectiveness of previous help*, especially when reporting *intimate terrorism*. While victims of *intimate terrorism* are typically more likely to receive formal help (Johnson, 2011; Leone et al., 2007), this type of IPV may be particularly difficult to terminate due to persistent patterns of abuse and control, and efforts to help are not always effective. In these cases, bystanders were often aware of the pattern of abuse for months, and sometimes years. As intervention in IPV is a dynamic and fluid process that can have psychological and emotional consequences for bystanders, including anxiety, guilt and self-blame (Gregory et al., 2017; Latta & Goodman, 2011), it is pivotal to acknowledge these challenges, and to support bystanders by providing guidance when seeking advice or deciding to report. Indeed, the reports indicated it was quite common for bystanders to experience stress and guilt. Future research should explore the barriers bystanders of IPV experience during this process and how they navigate these challenges over time.

Among bystanders who reported *situational couple violence*, the most common reason for reporting was a *recent escalation* of violence. Signs of a *recent escalation* likely increase bystanders' perception of the severity of the situation, which is known to increase their willingness to report IPV (Leon et al., 2022). Especially in *situational couple violence*, where conflict resolution and communication skills may escalate into two-sided violence (Johnson, 2008), the *need* for help may not always be clear (Leone

et al., 2014). Therefore, a *recent escalation* of violence may serve as a crucial turning point for bystanders, making the need to intervene more evident and less ambiguous.

Several other findings emerged from our data. First, we found that many bystanders who reported suspicions of IPV had engaged in previous actions (e.g., calling the police, talking to the (one of) the partners), and reporting was not an isolated action, but often a last resort after previous actions did not succeed. As such, bystander intervention in IPV appears to be a continuous effort, and could, thus, be conceptualized as a continuum of actions. Future research could elaborate on this by analyzing the range of acts of intervention that bystanders engage in over time. This finding also raises an important challenge, as many previous actions – both by bystanders and professionals – do not suffice and the domestic violence agency is often informed as a last resort, meaning victims continue to be exposed to severe harm. As mentioned previously, another important theme that emerged was the impact on bystanders' own well-being. To continue to involve bystanders in efforts to combat IPV, while simultaneously taking care of their well-being, it is essential to consider bystanders' needs in future studies.

Limitations

While our data comprised observations of real-life situations, thereby avoiding the limitations of vignette studies (Hoefnagels & Zwikker, 2007), this study has several important limitations. First, we relied on bystander reports summarized by employees, and although these summaries are approved by the reporting bystander and written by trained employees, we cannot retrieve the exact content of the conversations. It is possible that bystanders may have provided more detail than what was included in the report.

Although we categorized reports as *intimate terrorism* and *situational couple violence*, it is important to note that this was based on bystanders' *descriptions* of IPV, which may not accurately reflect the dynamics of the situation. As such, we cannot completely disregard the possibility that, for example, some reports categorized as *situational couple violence*, may have entailed violent responses to *intimate terrorism*, or that IPV against a woman did not include the pattern of coercion and control that is embedded in *intimate terrorism*. Yet, matters of coercion and control are heavily influenced by gender, which therefore should form a core focus of our understanding of IPV (Johnson, 2023). As such, the vast majority of reports are likely consistent with Johnson's typology – a typology for which overwhelming support has been found (Conroy et al., 2022) – and, with the exception of one report, all reports indicated patterns of abuse rather than isolated incidents. As argued by Johnson (2006), “[i]f we

want to understand partner violence, to intervene effectively in individual cases, or to make useful policy recommendations, we must [always] make these distinctions” (p. 1015). Because of our focus on understanding how bystanders perceive and respond to these situations, these perspectives are crucial. Yet, future research should address this limitation by relying on data that allows to analyze the dynamics of IPV and bystanders’ perceptions to a greater extent, for example by corroborating bystanders’ perceptions with victims’ accounts of the violence. Further, to encourage bystander reporting of IPV, it is essential to know in what situations and under what conditions they do so. Future studies could conduct in-depth interviews with bystanders who have reported to a domestic violence helpline to gain an understanding of the mechanisms that influence this decision. As our study only provides insight into bystanders who reported, we do not know why bystanders who are aware of IPV do *not* report the abuse. Future research should therefore also aim to uncover the decision-making processes among bystanders who do not intervene.

We used all reports registered as IPV in one geographical region in the Netherlands. As *Safe at Home* does not register the bystander’s residence – which need not to be similar to that of the victim and/or offender – we cannot analyze to what extent bystanders’ willingness to intervene may vary within this region. In addition, there is no data available that allows us to compare these regions, as permission for data collection was only received from this region. As such, future research should investigate bystanders’ reporting behavior in other regions and countries. In addition, future studies should analyze if and how IPV exposure and subsequent bystander reporting behavior may vary across urban and rural areas for a more comprehensive understanding.

In addition, previous research conducted in the Netherlands suggests that the taboo on IPV and on talking about “private” issue may inhibit help-seeking among victims, which was particularly reported by women in cultural groups that emphasize family collectivism (Pels et al., 2015). As such, it is possible that cultural norms, in addition to aspects such as social cohesion, education, and socio-economic status, may play a role in IPV disclosure and/or exposure, which may subsequently influence bystander intervention. Further, decisions to report IPV may be influenced by bystanders’ perceptions of formal authorities. More generally, it has been found that individuals from minoritized communities tend to show lower levels of general trust compared to majoritized groups in the Netherlands (De Vroome et al., 2013). As such, it is possible that perceptions of formal authorities may discourage reporting to these authorities, while shared group membership in terms of ethnic or cultural identity may also affect bystanders’ decision to intervene (Levine et al., 2005). As we only have data of

bystanders who decided to report to the hotline, we are unable to investigate to what extent such aspects may play a role in the decision not to intervene by reporting. Therefore, we call for future studies to incorporate this important avenue of research, for example by conducting interviews or focus groups across an ethnically and culturally diverse sample.

Further, over half of the reports were filed anonymously, indicating the potential importance of anonymous reporting of IPV for bystanders. As it was beyond the scope of the current study to analyze *why* bystanders choose to report anonymously, future research should aim to uncover bystanders' reasoning for doing so. Additionally, analyzing potential gender differences in anonymous reporting of IPV would be informative, given women's tendency to use indirect forms of intervention in IPV (Berkowitz et al., 2022; West & Wandrei, 2002).

In addition, we excluded reports involving women as perpetrators due to their low prevalence and the lack of detailed information to differentiate between *intimate terrorism* and *situational couple violence* in these cases. Yet, as men's victimization of IPV tends to be highly underreported and is often perceived differently (Dutton & White, 2013), it is crucial for future research to explore bystander responses in these situations.

Further, gender of bystanders, victims and perpetrators were based on information by the registering employee, defining individuals as 'man' or 'woman'. As such, we lack knowledge of how individuals self-identify in terms of gender, and this distinction does not do justice to identities outside the gender binary and the fluidity of gender self-identification (Miller, 2002; Valcore & Pfeffer, 2018). Future research would benefit from adopting a more inclusive operationalization of gender. Additionally, our sample only included reports of IPV among heterosexual couples, as there were no reports on same-sex couples in our data. As victims in same-sex couples may experience additional barriers and greater inhibitions to disclose IPV compared to heterosexual couples (Sylaska & Edwards, 2014), exploring how bystanders can facilitate intervention among same-sex couples is essential.

Last, the data were collected during the COVID-19 pandemic and included reports made during lockdowns in the Netherlands. While we do not see differences in the identified themes during this period, it is possible that the pandemic has affected bystanders' willingness to report or the personal or situational factors surrounding their reports.

Conclusion

Our results indicate that bystanders report IPV when the need of help is clear, and their motivation for acting concerns the well-being of victims. Bystanders reported IPV regardless of whom they perceived as the perpetrator. Yet, the perception of who needs help and protection from harm differed, as situations perceived as *situational couple violence* often revolved around a primary need to protect children, compared to the protection of both the woman victim and children in *intimate terrorism*. Bystanders often reported IPV when they felt other options were exhausted, especially among those reporting *intimate terrorism*. There were no major gender differences in the reporting of *intimate terrorism* and *situational couple violence*. Yet, women more often reported emotional violence as the only type of IPV, whereas men predominantly reported if they (also) suspected physical violence. Our findings contribute to the growing body of literature suggesting that bystander behaviors by men and women are context-specific.

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Chapter 5

Why bystanders report intimate partner violence anonymously: A qualitative analysis of real-life cases

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CVB conceived the research, performed the analysis and wrote the text. VE facilitated access to the data. VE, MRL and DW provided feedback on earlier versions of the draft.

Abstract

Although bystanders can play an important role in combating intimate partner violence (IPV), they also experience unique barriers and challenges that may prevent them from involvement. While anonymous reporting could potentially address some of these barriers, this form of intervention has rarely been studied. Using a thematic analysis of case files ($N=34$ reports), this study investigates bystanders' reasons to report suspicions of IPV anonymously to a domestic violence hotline. Results indicate that anonymity allowed bystanders to balance the desire to protect the victim(s) from harm with the fear for potential consequences for themselves and/or their relationship with the victim(s).

Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) consists of behavior that may cause physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, psychological abuse, controlling behavior, and sexual coercion, committed against a current or former partner, which affects about one third of all women worldwide (World Health Organization, 2024). The importance of bystanders, consisting of individuals within the informal network, such as friends, family members and neighbors, in intervening in IPV has been increasingly recognized. While they have the potential to play a crucial role in the early recognition and termination of IPV, bystanders also experience unique challenges and barriers in relation to their involvement (Gregory, 2017; Griffin & Worthington, 2023). Previous research suggests that bystanders have concerns about the victim being harmed, but also about their relationship with the victim and their own safety (Gregory, 2017; Gregory et al., 2017; Latta, 2008). The barriers that bystanders may experience when it comes to reporting IPV could potentially be addressed through the possibility of anonymous reporting to a domestic violence agency as a form of authoritative third-party intervention.

While reporting to a domestic violence hotline may result in formal help aimed at improving safety and well-being regarding IPV, the involvement of a formal system that possesses authority to intervene independent of the individuals results in a “private” matter being brought into an institutional arena, emphasizing the framing of “trouble” as “wrongdoing” and transforming interpersonal relationships (Emerson, 2015). As such, bystanders may be concerned about perceived consequences, including fear or retribution (Gregory, 2017; Gregory et al., 2017). By reporting suspicions anonymously, bystanders still involve an authority that can offer professional help, but they may potentially be protected from such consequences because their identity is not revealed to the involved individuals.

Importantly, the role of anonymity has rarely been investigated in the context of reporting IPV or domestic violence more generally. While anonymous reporting has been analyzed in other settings, including whistleblowing (Kiel et al., 2010; Lowry et al., 2013), fraud (Johansson & Carey, 2016) and social media harassment (Wong et al., 2021), previous studies tend to rely on experimental designs, meaning that much remains unknown about the *meaning* of anonymity among those who report real-life situations. This is particularly important because such experiments are unable to capture the actual relationship with the reported individual(s) and potential real-life consequences that may play a role when bystanders report situations evolving in real life. As such, insights into bystanders’ perspectives and experiences in real-life

situations are much needed and fill an important gap in the literature, in particular in the context of IPV, where hypothetical reports of what individuals *say* they would do tend to be the focus as opposed to real-life data (Kuskoff & Parsell, 2024) and where bystanders face important barriers in relation to their involvement (Gregory, 2017; Gregory et al., 2017; Latta, 2008). This is particularly important because IPV is severely underreported, with victims experiencing several barriers in reporting to police (e.g., fear of being identified as primary aggressor, fear of retaliation; Wolf et al., 2003) and tending to seek help within their informal support system instead (Kaukinen, 2002; Palermo et al., 2014).

To this extent, I use case files from *Safe at Home*, the official domestic violence agency in the Netherlands, to qualitatively analyze bystanders' reasons to report their suspicions anonymously (i.e., their information will not be revealed under any circumstances) ($N = 34$). Understanding why bystanders choose to report their suspicions to a domestic violence agency *anonymously* could provide insight into their perspectives and potentially their needs. While anonymous reporting may also come with challenges – and incorporating victim perspectives in such efforts is crucial – gaining an understanding of what drives bystanders to rely on anonymity represents an important step in enhancing our understanding of bystanders' diverse roles in addressing IPV. In addition, this study will explore the extent to which anonymity holds varying implications for men and women. Previous research indicates that women are generally more willing to intervene in IPV, and to do so indirectly compared to men (e.g., Banyard et al., 2020; Berkowitz et al., 2022; Casper et al., 2021; Katz & Nguyen, 2016; Park & Kim, 2023), which may be the result of the enactment of gendered expectations in helping behavior (West & Zimmerman, 1989). Given that fear of physical injury poses a stronger barrier for women in IPV intervention (Weitzman, 2020), it is possible that anonymous reporting and its underlying reasons may differ accordingly. In the following sections, I will discuss the literature on bystander intervention in IPV, reporting IPV, and (anonymous) reporting in other settings.

Bystander intervention in IPV

The potential of including bystanders actively has been recognized in the prevention, de-escalation or termination of IPV (e.g., Berkowitz et al., 2023; Kuskoff & Parsell, 2024; Park & Kim, 2023; Pagliaro et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2019; Weitzman et al., 2020). As reported by Kuskoff and Parsell (2024), previous studies suggest that bystander intervention in IPV is quite common, with estimates of individuals who

either intervened in IPV themselves or had someone intervene on their behalf ranging from 26% to 76% (Weitzman et al., 2020; Taket et al., 2014). Intervention strategies that are available to bystanders are diverse, and may range from direct intervention (e.g., physical) to involving third parties (e.g., calling the police) to providing emotional or practical support or referring the victim to IPV services (Latta & Goodman, 2011; Kuskoff & Parsell, 2024; McMahan & Banyard, 2012; Moschella & Banyard, 2020; Weitzman et al., 2020).

Yet, bystander intervention in IPV also comes with several barriers and challenges. Previous research suggests that bystanders often feel unsure about how to act and question their effectiveness when they do intervene (Latta & Goodman, 2011). In addition to feelings of guilt, shame, worry and powerlessness (Gregory et al., 2017), bystanders may have concerns for the victim's safety, potential damage to their relationship with the victim, and their own safety (Gregory, 2017; Gregory et al., 2017; Latta, 2008). While the fear of harm to the victim or damaging or losing the relationship with the victim appears constant, especially if the victim remains in the relationship (Latta, 2008), bystanders' concerns about their own safety may be especially important in their decision to intervene. Indeed, fear of injury is notably the most prevalent barrier for bystander intervention in IPV (Weitzman et al., 2020), and fear of personal harm or injury inhibits bystanders' willingness to intervene in various settings, including IPV, sexual violence, and dating violence (Debnam & Mauer, 2021; Hoxmeier et al., 2019; Mainwaring et al., 2022; Robinson et al., 2022; Weitzman et al., 2020). This fear may not be unwarranted, as studies have found that those who support victims of IPV may encounter threats, intimidation or even violence from the perpetrator (Gregory, 2017; Gregory et al., 2017). Importantly, fear may result in bystanders being less likely to support victims, potentially resulting in negative responses and exacerbating the victim's isolation (Goodkind et al., 2003). Therefore, it is crucial to provide bystanders with suitable intervention alternatives when they fear or risk violent retaliation (Mainwaring et al., 2022).

Previous research suggests that women are generally more willing to intervene in IPV compared to men, and are more likely to rely on indirect forms of intervention (e.g., reporting to police or third parties) whereas men prefer to intervene physically (Banyard et al., 2020; Berkowitz et al., 2022; Casper et al., 2021; Gracia et al., 2009; Katz & Nguyen, 2016; Palmer et al., 2018; Sylaska & Walters, 2014; West & Wandrei, 2002). The fear of physical injury has been found to be a stronger barrier to intervene in IPV for women than for men (Weitzman et al., 2020), which may also influence their intervention strategies. Indeed, women rate bystander actions that include involving formal and semiformal systems (e.g., calling the police or a

domestic violence hotline) as more feasible and more effective compared to men (Frye et al., 2012). Women's preference to rely on indirect forms of intervention has also been found in other settings, including sexual violence (Cook & Reynald, 2016; Mainwaring et al., 2022), sexual harassment (McDonald et al., 2016) and child abuse (Hoefnagels & Zwikker, 2001). This may be explained by gender role expectations, encompassing social and cultural norms about how individuals should behave in terms of masculinity and femininity, which individuals may enact in their helping behavior (West & Zimmerman, 1989). Yet, while prior research has extensively examined gender differences in terms of likelihood and types of intervention, less is understood about the underlying motivations that drive bystanders to choose specific forms of intervention in IPV.

Bystander intervention through reporting IPV

While bystanders often initially engage in informal forms of intervention, such as offering support, they may involve formal systems when the situation cannot be resolved or results in high levels of threat and violence (Emerson, 2015). By reporting their suspicions to a domestic violence agency, bystanders involve a formal system which may help terminate patterns of abuse through referral to various forms of professional help. Research indicates that bystanders rate the involvement of formal systems as the most effective form of intervention, suggesting that bystanders believe professional assistance may be most helpful in preventing future violence (Frye et al., 2012). Indeed, involvement of professional help, such as victim service agencies, has been found to be more useful in reducing repeat victimization than arresting the perpetrator (Xie & Lynch, 2017).

In contrast to bystanders who intervene informally, formal systems possess authority independent of the individuals to intervene in ways consistent with their organizational aims, which may include priorities that diverge from the priorities of the involved individuals (Emerson, 2015). When bystanders report IPV to an authority, they adhere to the system governed by those authorities, and the framing of "trouble" as "wrongdoing" is emphasized and set forth as an offense in need of redress (Emerson, 2015). As such, individuals responsible for reporting suspicions of IPV to a domestic violence hotline may face or anticipate consequences from involving an authoritative third party, and the fear of retribution, a common concern among bystanders of IPV (Gregory, 2017; Gregory et al., 2017; Latta, 2008), may deter individuals from reporting suspicions of IPV. Indeed, previous research suggests that bystanders are often afraid that the abuser will retaliate against them if they call the

police (Hobart, 2002), and fear of retribution has been found to prevent individuals from reporting crime to the police (Hardy, 2019; Rabaiotti & Smith, 2023) and from whistleblowing (Moore & McAuliffe, 2012).

(Anonymous) reporting in other settings

The barriers that bystanders may experience when it comes to reporting illegal or illegitimate behavior, including fear of retribution, could potentially be addressed through the possibility of anonymous reporting. While anonymous reporting still results in bringing “trouble” into an institutional system (Emerson, 2015), the person responsible for doing so will typically not be held accountable by the involved individuals for involving the authorities and may, as such, be protected from potential consequences. The availability of an anonymous or confidential reporting system to encourage reporting of illegal behavior has been found to be an effective means in overcoming the fear of reporting crime to an official agency, because it allowed individuals to share information in a secure and safe way, and helped to give them reassurance and build trust (Rabaiotti & Smith, 2023). Previous studies suggest that the availability of anonymity may increase reporting behavior (Johansson & Carey, 2016; Kiel et al., 2010; Lowry et al., 2013; Wong et al., 2021), as it may reduce bystanders’ concerns about personal costs, such as negative evaluation and retaliation (Wong et al., 2021).

For bystanders of IPV, who often have close ties to the victim and/or perpetrator, and fear for the victim’s safety, their relationship with the victim, and their own safety when they intervene (Gregory, 2017; Gregory et al., 2017; Goodkind et al., 2003; Latta, 2008; Riger et al., 2002), anonymity may help mitigate some of these fears and remove certain barriers that bystanders may experience. Yet, anonymous reporting has rarely been studied in the context of IPV and other forms of domestic violence. While studies in other contexts have particularly focused on whether anonymity may increase reporting or to what extent it may be effective – often utilizing hypothetical scenarios (e.g., Johansson & Carey, 2016; Kaplan et al., 2009) which may not fully reflect respondents’ actual behavior (Baumeister et al., 2007; Jerolmack & Khan, 2014), much remains unknown about the *meaning* of anonymity for bystanders who have engaged in actual reporting. With IPV research often relying on hypothetical scenarios, there is a growing need for data sources that offer insights into real-life situations (Kuskoff & Parsell, 2024). Every year, thousands of reports containing suspicions of domestic violence reports are filed anonymously to the national domestic violence agency in the Netherlands, with nearly 4,000 anonymous reports in

2023 (CBS, 2024). While a few studies have analyzed bystanders' reasons to intervene in IPV more generally (e.g., Casper et al., 2021; Walker et al., 2021), including bystanders' reasons to report to a domestic violence hotline ([blinded for review]), it remains unknown *why* bystanders who report their suspicions choose anonymity. As bystanders have the potential to play a crucial role in intervening in IPV, but also face substantial challenges regarding their involvement (Gregory, 2017; Griffin & Worthington, 2023), understanding their reasons for anonymous reporting could provide insights into their perspectives and potentially their needs. It is important to note that this study focuses on the perspectives of the *bystanders*, which may not align with the perspectives and needs of victims (McMahon, 2024). While anonymous reporting could potentially offer bystanders a form of protection, it is important to note that it does not have to result in positive outcomes for the individuals to whom the reports concerns. That being said, gaining a deeper understanding of what drives bystanders to choose anonymity represents an important step in enhancing our understanding of bystanders' diverse roles in addressing IPV.

Data & methods

Data used in the current study consist of case files collected from one *Safe at Home* (in Dutch: Veilig Thuis) region, the official domestic violence agency in the Netherlands. The agency is divided into 25 regions and can be approached by individuals – such as victims, professionals and bystanders – who seek advice and/or want to report suspicions of domestic violence or child maltreatment. The agency offers a hotline that can be consulted 24 hours a day. Victims may contact *Safe at Home* themselves for advice or to file a report. Based on the protocol, victims maintain control over their situation during advice and/or support, and the agency does not initiate action without their explicit consent (Veilig Thuis, 2018). If bystanders call for advice, the agency will discuss what the bystander could do to discuss their concerns with the individuals or how they could address these concerns themselves. *Safe at Home* may advise the bystander to change their advice into a report if there are concerns about immediate or structural unsafety or a multi-problematic living situation in which the individuals are not open to professional help, and if the possibilities for the bystander to adequately approach the situation are insufficient (Veilig Thuis, 2018).

Reports can be filed by bystanders (e.g., neighbor, family member) or by professionals who are subject to mandatory reporting. If citizens and professionals express that they want to file a report, the report contains a suspicion of domestic violence or

child maltreatment, and the reporter shared their identity and contact information, *Safe at Home* is required to act. If the reporter does *not* want to disclose their identity and contact information – meaning that the reporter wants to remain anonymous both towards the perpetrator and/or victim and towards the agency (i.e., “double anonymity”) – the report typically will not be investigated. However, if a supervisor, based on the report, determines that there is a reasonable suspicion of immediate or structural unsafety for the individuals involved, which has to be motivated and documented in the system, the report can still be investigated. According to the protocol, the starting point is that the identity of the person who files a report will be communicated to the individuals involved in the report. There are, however, two exceptions to this, which are implemented in an executive order (in Dutch: ‘Uitvoeringsbesluit bij de WMO 2015’). First, bystanders who report share their name, address and contact information, but their identity will only be revealed to the family with their explicit permission. This means that, when bystanders do *not* want their identity to be revealed to the involved individuals, their information will not be communicated to them, and the report will be registered as an anonymous report. Second, when professionals file a report, they typically inform the involved individuals themselves, but professionals can request an exception when disclosure of their identity may form a threat for the involved individual(s), for the professional, or could potentially damage the relationship of trust with the involved individuals (Veilig Thuis, 2018). As such, the information that is collected from individuals who file a report is similar for anonymous and non-anonymous reports, but the difference lies in the disclosure of this information to the involved individuals. Regardless of anonymity, employees will ask bystanders a range of questions, including the relationship to the involved individuals, the family structure, their aim and expectations of the report, and an estimation of the current level of safety.

The employee who receives the report will support and advise the reporting individuals, and will also discuss the consequences of the procedure, including potential (negative) consequences of reporting anonymously. In particular, anonymous reporting may result in the individuals distrusting their environment, potentially leading to (further) isolation, whereas the agency’s approach to domestic violence includes reducing isolation (Veilig Thuis, 2018). Further, in case of an anonymous report, the description of the reported concerns must be treated with greater caution due to the risk of traceability, meaning that some information cannot be shared and discussed with the involved individuals (Veilig Thuis, 2018). Note that reports by an individual who also want to remain anonymous to the agency (i.e., they do not want to share their information with the employee) will *only* be investigated if there is a reasonable

suspicion of immediate or structural unsafety for the involved individuals, and this decision has to be documented in the case file (Veilig Thuis, 2018).

After a report, *Safe at Home* becomes responsible for monitoring the safety of all involved individuals and is in a position to connect signals from various sources with the report, enabling an assessment of acute and structural unsafety. The agency collects, analyzes and evaluates the available information and professional judgments about the reported suspicion with the aim of determining whether domestic violence is occurring and identifying the steps that need to be taken to stop the violence, ensure safety, and repair the damage (Veilig Thuis, 2018). Depending on the outcome, *Safe at Home* may refer the case to specialized care, arrange emergency shelter or may decide to get actively involved and/or start up an in-depth investigation. If the agency decides to engage in direct involvement, they typically first talk to the individuals to whom the report concerns and informs them in advance about the contacts they will establish with others. Specifically, they will inform them, among other things, about the content of the report, the identity of the reporter (except for when the report is anonymous), their tasks and powers, and the next steps. During this conversation, the individuals are asked to share their vision on the report and on their situation. The conversations are reported in writing by the agency and the individuals are offered the opportunity to correct factual inaccuracies in these reports and to add information, and they are informed about their legal rights.¹ Based on the investigation, the agency may decide to transfer the case to professional help, to investigate further – for example by requesting information from other organizations and authorities – or to end their involvement if there are no reasonable suspicions of domestic violence and no concerns (anymore) of the safety of the individuals. Further, the agency can decide to create conditions and to follow up later if there are indications of immediate or structural unsafety but the involved individuals are sufficiently willing and able to collaborate on restoring safety and to accept support, or to refer the case to the individuals themselves without such conditions (Veilig Thuis, 2018). The individual who reported the situation receives feedback after the safety assessment, but due to privacy considerations this information is limited to whether the report is under consideration (Veilig Thuis, 2018).

1. The only exception to refrain from contacting the individuals (immediately) is when the safety assessment can proceed without contacting (all of) them, when the safety of the individuals, employees or others are at risk, or when the case is directly transferred to another agency under the condition that they will inform the involved individuals according to the same guidelines as mentioned above.

Sample selection

The case files were collected from one Safe at Home region from April to October 2021. The data collection was part of a larger project focusing on domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic (see Coomans et al., 2023). The project was positively evaluated by the Ethical Committee of [blinded for review]. For the purpose of the current study, reports were included if they met several inclusion criteria. Reports had to be categorized by the agency as “intimate partner violence”², had to be reported between January 2019 and December 2020, and had to be reported by bystanders (i.e., a non-professional individual who called *Safe at Home* to report IPV). As such, reports filed by professionals who reported because of mandatory reporting policies (e.g., police, schools) and reports made by involved individuals (i.e., perpetrator, victim, or child) were excluded. Further, reports of which the agency explicitly noted – after investigating the reported suspicion – that the content of the report could not be substantiated and that they suspected that the report consisted of false accusations, were excluded from the sample. In each of these reports, *Safe at Home* concluded that they were the result of false accusations resulting from on-going conflicts between the bystander and the involved family (e.g., neighborhood quarrel). In addition, one case that was deleted upon request by the family was inaccessible and, as such, also excluded.³ Given the focus on anonymous reporting, the current study only included those reports that were made anonymously *and* where the reason for anonymity was reported. Unfortunately, although the reason for anonymity is typically discussed with bystanders, this was not documented in about a third of the anonymous reports. This resulted in a total of 34 reports across 31 cases. Note that multiple reports can be made within one case and they are all registered as individual reports within the same case ID number. An overview of the sample selection process can be found in Figure 1 below.

The case files were accessed through the organizational system at one *Safe at Home* location. For each selected case file, extensive information was transcribed and/or copied into Excel by the author and two other researchers. This information included

2. Upon receiving the report, the agency registers the report under one or more forms of domestic violence. The agency operationalizes IPV as every form of repeated violence, which may include, physical, emotional, psychological and/or financial violence, stalking and other forms of violence, between adult current or former partners. This is often characterized by a power imbalance, with the perpetrator having some form of control over the victim. IPV may occur in various forms, including but not limited to, *intimate terrorism* and *situational couple violence*.
3. Individuals to whom the report concerns have the right to have their data rectified, and can file a request with the agency to change or delete information on the grounds that the information is incorrect, incomplete or irrelevant. *Safe at Home* is required to honor the request if the outcome of the investigation has contested the content of the report. In this one case, *Safe at Home* has decided to approve the request for undisclosed reasons, and has deleted the records.

the full report as filed by the bystander, which consisted of the bystander's perception of the type, duration, and severity of the situation, how they became aware, and their aims and expectations regarding the report. For anonymous reports, all available information related to the bystander's decision to report anonymously was coded. Other information included statements by victims, offenders and involved parties, demographic information, information from other agencies, and information related to the agency's investigation. To ensure confidentiality, any information that could be identifiable to the involved individuals or bystanders was removed, and the dataset was safely stored in the Secure Analytics Lab, which is ISO 27001 certified and completely separated from the internet. The coded data were then imported and analyzed in Atlas.ti version 9.

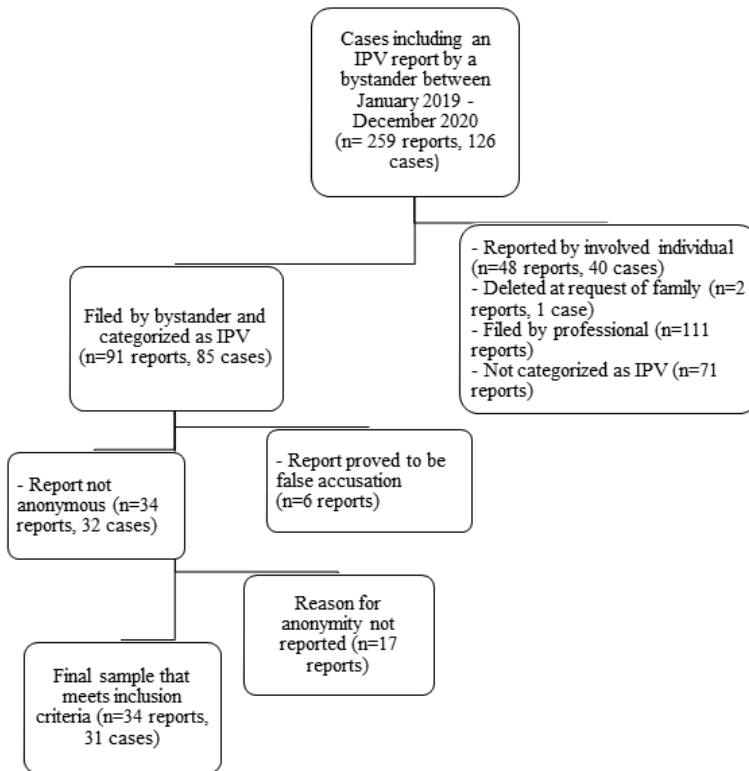


Figure 1. Overview of sample selection

Note. Numbers are mutually exclusive. When multiple exclusion criteria applied (e.g., report proved to be a false accusation *and* was not anonymous), the report was included in the count for the criterion that is listed above the other (i.e., in case of a false accusation *and* not anonymous, the report was included in the count of the false accusations). Note that the *number* of cases in the final sample is not mutually exclusive, as cases may consist of multiple reports and reports may have been excluded based on varying criteria (e.g., for one case with two reports, it is possible that one report was not anonymous and one report was anonymous but the reason was not reported).

Analytic strategy

A thematic analysis was applied to gain a deeper understanding of bystander's reasons to report their suspicions of IPV to a domestic violence agency *anonymously*. The approach consisted of a combination of deductive and inductive methods (Clarke & Braun, 2017). First, a deductive approach was used, in which extant literature on bystander intervention, IPV and anonymity was collected and analyzed. Given the lack of research on anonymity and bystander reporting in IPV specifically, these studies primarily focused on experiences and perceptions of bystanders of IPV more generally (e.g., Gregory, 2017; Gregory et al., 2017; Latta, 2008; Latta & Goodman, 2011). Further, previous literature in other fields of anonymous reporting was also included and analyzed (e.g., crime reporting, whistleblowing, workplace harassment; Aiello, 2019; Leavitt et al., 2021; Moore & McAuliffe, 2012; Nicksa, 2014; Tolsma et al., 2012). Analysis of the literature revealed that fear played an important role both among bystanders of IPV in general (e.g., Gregory et al., 2017; Latta & Goodman, 2011) as well as in anonymous reporting in other contexts (e.g., Tolsma et al., 2021), and so did the existence of a close relationship in anonymous reporting (e.g., Leavitt et al., 2021). Based on author's familiarity with the case files and the overview of previous literature, several potential themes related to anonymous reporting (i.e., fear, closeness) were identified prior to the actual coding. Note that themes relating to bystanders' reason to intervene in IPV in general were included in a different project, and, as such, not reported here (see [blinded for review]). The potential themes were included in an initial coding scheme, and were formulated in a general sense to allow for more detailed inductive coding. In addition, the coding scheme included descriptive codes that were previously categorized by *Safe at Home*, such as the type of bystander (i.e., family, social network, neighbor) and gender of bystander (i.e., man or woman). Further, information that provided context, such as how the bystander became aware (i.e., direct signs, disclosure or informed by others) and the perceived form of violence (i.e., emotional, physical, sexual, financial) were also included.

As anonymous reporting appeared to be done as way to *avoid* potential consequences, the case files were additionally analyzed to see to how the involved individuals, who were reported by the bystander, reacted to the report and to what extent the potential consequences feared by the bystander nevertheless occurred despite anonymity. Note that there is typically no further contact with the bystander who reported, so this information is primarily based on responses from the partners in particular – though these responses are not always present in the case files (e.g., if the agency immediately refers the case to specialized care) – and occasionally on additional contact with bystanders.

The author then used this coding scheme to independently code a random sample which comprised 9 anonymous reports (corresponding to 26.47% of the sample used in the current study). The coding scheme was used as a starting point, but any other information that appeared relevant and that was not included in the scheme was coded as well. In addition, one of the other researchers involved in the coding process at *Safe at Home* independently coded the same reports. Note that the researcher was aware of the research questions, but coded this sample without access to the coding scheme to allow for independency. The comparison and discussion of the reports revealed that the codes that were applied by both coders related to the same themes (e.g., fear). Other relevant themes that were identified by both coders – which did not relate to anonymous reporting but were nevertheless useful – were discussed and combined into one coding scheme that served as the starting point for the coding of the full sample in Atlas.ti.

The author then conducted multiple cycles of coding, with a particular focus on bystanders' reasons to report IPV anonymously. The first cycle of coding consisted of applying the initial coding scheme and writing extensive analytic memos. The identified codes started out in a general sense (e.g., fear), but after the first cycle of coding, more specific subthemes were identified (e.g., fear for safety) which were then applied during the second cycle of coding. After the codes were reviewed and refined and analyzed in detail, several additional codes emerged (e.g., prior threats as a subtheme within 'fear for safety'), which were applied in additional cycles of coding. Within these themes, additional attention was paid to how concerns were phrased by men and women in the report. Note that any additional themes related to reporting IPV more generally also emerged and were captured by using open codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As these inductively derived codes consisted of information relating to reporting in general, and not necessarily to anonymous reporting, these codes will not be discussed here (see [blinded for review]). The coding process was finalized when saturation was reached and no new themes or codes emerged.

Results

In total, 34 reports were included, of which most reports ($n=26$; 76.5%) were filed by women, followed by men ($n=7$), and in one case bystander's gender was not specified. In terms of social relationship, most anonymous reports ($n=23$; 67.7%) were filed by neighbors, followed by family members ($n=8$), social network members ($n=1$), and two cases in which the relationship was not reported. In over half of the reports (55.9%), bystanders suspected that the IPV was perpetrated by a man ($n=19$). In about a third

of the reports ($n = 12$; 35.3%), bystanders suspected mutual perpetration, and in a smaller portion ($n = 3$; 8.8%) bystander suspected that it was perpetrated by a woman. Compared to the full sample of IPV reports, consisting of 85 bystander (anonymous and non-anonymous) reports, the number of reports filed by women is slightly higher within the anonymous sample (76.5% vs. 67.1%), and so is the number of reports filed by neighbors (67.7% vs. 55.3%).

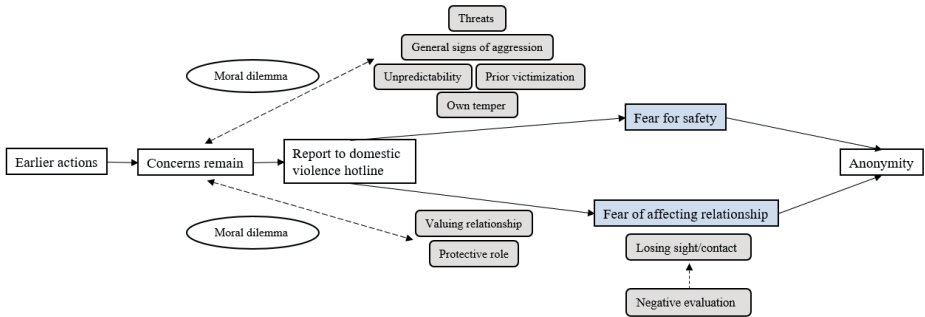


Figure 2. Overview of identified pathway of anonymous reporting

In Figure 2, a general pathway to anonymous reporting can be found. The analysis revealed that most bystanders had engaged in various previous actions once they became aware of IPV. While these earlier actions often consisted of informal support or assistance, such as talking to the individual(s) or offering practical support, occasionally bystanders also involved the authorities – prior to filing a report – by calling the police during an escalation. Whereas calling the police during a perceived emergency was done on the spur of the moment, filing a report came with more contemplation. When concerns remained despite these earlier actions, bystanders appeared to face a moral dilemma: Having severe concerns of IPV and wanting to protect the involved individuals from harm (see [blinded for review] for further detail on the reasons for reporting IPV) while simultaneously not wanting to risk their safety and/or not wanting to affect their relationship with the involved individual(s) as a result of involving a formal institution. When bystanders had safety concerns about reporting, they based this on various signs: Previous threats, general signs of aggression, unpredictability or – though both only identified once – prior victimization from the perpetrator(s), or their own temper.

Further, when bystanders feared that their report might have consequences for their relationship, they were particularly fearful that their report might result in losing sight on or contact with the involved individual(s) or they feared that they would evaluate the report negatively, which could potentially also affect their

relationship. These concerns were based on the value bystanders assigned to their relationship and/or the fulfillment of a protective role in their lives. Anonymous reporting, thus, appeared to occur as a way for bystanders to balance these concerns: By relying on anonymity bystanders were able to involve a formal institution that offers professional help and – by doing so – they gave substance to their feelings of responsibility to protect the individuals from further harm, while concomitantly minimizing their fears relating to their own safety and their relationship with the involved individual(s). In the sections below, I will discuss the specific reasons for reporting anonymously (i.e., fear for safety and fear for affecting the relationship) in more detail. An overview of the prevalence of each theme and subtheme can be found in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Prevalence of themes (N=34 reports)

Themes	n
Fear for safety	27
General signs of aggression	8
Threats	4
Unpredictability	7
Previous victimization	1
Own temper	1
Fear of affecting relationship	8
Losing sight/contact	5
Negative evaluation	3

Note. For ‘fear for safety’, not all subthemes were present in every report reflecting this concern. In some instances, it was clear that the bystander reported anonymously due to fear for their safety, but the cause of this fear was not detailed. Note that themes are not mutually exclusive. There was one case where the bystander’s fear for their safety was based on both general signs of aggression and unpredictability, and in one case the bystander feared for both their safety and their relationship.

Fear for safety

The most common reason to report anonymously included bystanders’ safety concerns, which emerged in 27 cases. This consisted of fear of potential consequences related to bystanders’ physical safety if the perpetrator(s) found out they were responsible for filing the report.

Note that bystanders feared these potential consequences specifically from the person they believed to be the aggressor, which could be one partner (i.e., often the man) or both partners. Further, while safety concerns mostly related to bystanders

themselves, they occasionally also feared for their own family, in particular their children. For both men and women, fear for safety emerged as primary reason for anonymity, but as will be elaborated, the underlying basis of this fear tended to vary. While safety concerns emerged across all cases, regardless of whom bystanders perceived as perpetrator, they were especially prominent in situations where bystanders suspected a man perpetrator. Safety concerns were mostly prevalent among neighbors (i.e., almost three out of four neighbors reported this), which likely has to do with their close spatial proximity: They were often exposed to violence directly (i.e., by hearing or seeing signs of IPV), and, as such, their fear might be the result of directly seeing the perpetrator's capability of violence. Within fear for safety, various subthemes were identified: 1) threats, 2) general signs of aggression, 3) unpredictability, 4) prior victimization, and 5) own temper. An overview of these subthemes can be found in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Overview of identified themes for 'fear for safety'

Threats. In several reports, bystanders mentioned having received explicit threats from the partner(s) prior to the report. An example includes a woman who reported on behalf of her friend who had fled her home with her daughter and temporarily stayed at the bystander's house following a severe escalation. The victim's network had been threatened by the partner, and they all stayed with other acquaintances to avoid potential confrontation with the perpetrator at the bystander's residence, heightening fear for the bystander's safety and prompting her to report anonymously. While threats were mostly directed to bystanders, they were occasionally also directed to their family, including their children. For example, in a case where the bystander suspected her neighbor, a woman, had perpetrated IPV against her ex-partner and engaged in child maltreatment, the following was noted: "[Bystander] feels threatened by [woman] and reports that she and her children are no longer safe. The daughter of [bystander] was threatened by [woman] with the following words: "If I see

you I will kill you or your parents so that you will have to live without them.” In such situations, bystanders, particularly women, feared for potential consequences for their children. Some of the threats were made specifically in relation to bystanders’ prior involvement, while in other cases, they related to an on-going conflict between the bystander and partner(s) (e.g., neighborhood quarrel).

General signs of aggression. In a portion of the reports, bystanders had safety concerns as a result of general signs of aggression. In these cases, bystanders did not report prior aggressive experiences with the perpetrator themselves, but they were aware of – or feared for – the perpetrator’s involvement in aggression more generally, for example if the partner was known in the neighborhood as an aggressive person. For example, it was mentioned that “he does not shy away from violence”, “[man] attacked a neighbor in the past [and] destroyed mailboxes of people living in the building” and “[man] has been in prison and is very aggressive.”

Unpredictability. For several bystanders, safety concerns stemmed from the perceived unpredictability of the perpetrator. In these cases, bystanders mentioned that they did not know what the perpetrator was capable of and/or they could not foresee how they would respond to the report. Note that this sometimes co-occurred with general signs of aggression, where bystanders, who did not have direct experience with the perpetrator’s aggression, seemed to link the perpetrator’s prior aggression towards others to the potential risk of retribution against themselves. In other cases, the unpredictability appeared to be related to the perpetrator’s aggression towards their partner, occasionally in combination with other concerns (e.g., substance use), where bystanders could not preclude the possibility that the perpetrator would also engage in aggression *outside* the nuclear family. Family members and friends seemed to base their fear not on actions directed towards themselves (e.g., threats), but more so on the signs of aggression and unpredictability based on how the offender acts towards the *victim*.

Prior victimization. Although not common, one man, who rented a room in the same house, had experienced prior victimization from the perpetrator who allegedly abused his partner, his children and their pets. The bystander expressed fear for his safety, citing a previous physical attack by the perpetrator that led to an anxiety disorder. When advised by the agency to call the police in case of immediate danger, he declined, fearing potential retaliation from the perpetrator due to their close proximity and the possibility of the authority’s involvement being traced back to him.

Own temper. One bystander indicated that he wanted to avoid confrontation that could potentially follow if the partner(s) would become aware that the bystander was the

one who reported his suspicions. The following was noted by the agency: “[Bystander] says he is worried about the safety of the involved individuals. [Bystander] says there are recurring fights (approximately half of the month) and screaming that can be heard. According to [bystander], this situation has been going on for months. [...] [Bystander] says he is not good at talking to temperamental persons, and wants to avoid an escalation with his neighbors, because he himself could get angry.” As such, the bystander’s fear for a potential escalation during a confrontation was based on his perceptions of his own temper – potentially resulting in physical harm to the perpetrator(s) and/or himself – and anonymity was perceived as a way to prevent a physical escalation.

While fear for safety was the most common reason to report anonymously for both men and women, different patterns emerged. For men, fear for safety was primarily based on *threats* and – though only in one case – on prior victimization. While *threats* also played a role in women’s fear for safety, this was also often based on perceived *unpredictability* and *general signs of aggression*. In particular, women appeared to express more general statements, such as “[she] does not know what the individuals are capable of and therefore wants to report anonymously” and “[she] does not want to bring something upon herself.” Further, fear for safety occasionally extended to women’s concerns about their children: “[She] is concerned about her own safety [and] she has a child of approximately 1 year old. She does not know how [man] would react.” For men, statements tended to include more explicit references to threats or violence: “[He] states that the involved individuals, in particular the man, will react with anger and potentially violence [...] [He] does not dare to talk to [man] himself, because he is afraid he will get hit himself”, and “[He] is afraid for [man], he has been physically attacked.”

In many of the cases, the involved individuals denied the suspicions and attributed the reports to other circumstances. For example, they mentioned that the report was the result of a prior conflict (mostly neighborhood quarrels) or of revenge. While bystanders often feared for their safety, there was no mentioning of retaliation through aggressive or physical confrontation against bystanders who reported anonymously. In a few cases, the partner(s) engaged in a reaction, particularly if there was a pre-existing conflict with the one who they suspected had filed the report. For example, in one case a woman later called the agency stating that she knew her sister was the one who reported, due to a long-lasting conflict between them and her sister recently posting something on social media, and that she was going to file a police report against her for defamation. Note that anonymity may occasionally result in actions towards others, which occurred when a woman rang all her neighbors’

doorbells to ask them whether they were the one who reported. Although the agency did not disclose the identity of the reporting bystander, in a portion of the cases the involved individuals guessed the identity. An example includes: “[Woman] states that she knows what the report is about. Two weeks ago, she got into an argument with her partner. The neighbor [a woman] who used to be a close friend was in a violent relationship herself. [Woman] has helped her out of this, [but] since that moment their contact disintegrated. [Woman] states that her neighbor is jealous, which is why she reported and informs everyone. [Woman] states that all couples argue sometimes with stuff flying through the house.” Yet, in most cases this did not appear to result in any harm to or confrontation with the bystander who reported.

Fear of affecting relationship

In eight cases, bystanders reported anonymously out of fear that their report might have consequences for their relationship. This specifically related to the relationship between the bystander and the victim, and occasionally to the relationship with both partners. When family members maintained a close relationship with the partners’ children, these concerns particularly related to their relationship with these children. As mentioned, concerns of affecting the relationship with the involved individual(s) had to do with the value bystanders placed on their relationship with them, and – sometimes in combination with – the fulfillment of a protective role in the lives of the victim and often their children. In cases where bystanders perceived a man as the perpetrator, the fear of losing sight or contact primarily centered on the woman victim, potentially due to the perpetrator’s control and isolation, whereas in cases of mutual perpetration, these concerns were especially focused on the children. Specifically, bystanders choose to rely on anonymity, because 1) they feared for losing sight or contact with the involved individual(s), or 2) they were concerned about potential negative evaluation from the individual(s) they had some sort of (close) relationship with. An overview of the themes and subthemes is presented in Figure 4 below.

Fear of losing sight/contact. Bystanders mentioned the fear that revelation of their identity would result in the bystander losing sight of and/or contact with the partner(s). Reporting anonymously was particularly relevant for bystanders who were family members that maintained close ties with the family and fulfilled a protective role in their lives. Bystanders perceived their sight of and contact with the family as a form of protection, and were concerned that damaging this relationship could result in further escalation or isolation. When neighbors expressed the fear of losing sight or contact, they were not only in close proximity, but also appeared to have a good standing relationship with the involved individuals. An example includes: “[Bystander] wants to remain anonymous because there is frequent and good contact

with the family. [There are] concerns that this report could hinder visibility and obstruct the relationship.” In some cases, concerns specifically related to the partners’ children. An example in which this becomes apparent includes: “[Bystander] is child’s uncle. The child visits [bystander] regularly, and he is currently his only constant factor. [Bystander] is afraid the child’s parents will no longer bring the child, and that he will lose sight of the child’s well-being if the report is not anonymous.”

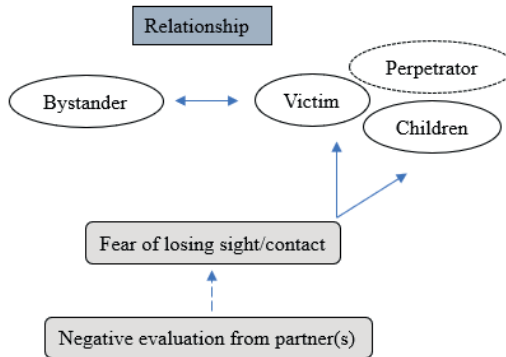


Figure 4. Overview of identified themes for ‘fear of affecting relationship’

Note. In particular, concerns related to the bystanders’ relationship with the victim and children, and occasionally (also) with the perpetrator (indicated by dotted line).

In another case, where a grandmother reported, concerns were attributed to explicit statements: “[Bystander] knows that there will be big consequences if [her identity] becomes known. The report is one of many serious reports and serious problems within the family. [...] [Bystander] knows that when it becomes known that she filed the report, she is no longer allowed to see her grandchildren. Her son threatened her with that.” In these situations, the concerns also related to the partners as parents. Consequently, it is not unlikely that the report may damage the relationship with the involved parties, as the parents may feel like their parenting abilities are being questioned by the bystander who reported them.

Negative evaluation. Several bystanders appeared to report anonymously because of fears that their action would be evaluated negatively by the individual(s) they have a relationship with. This, again, appears to be particularly relevant for bystanders who maintain close ties with the partner(s) they report. Although these bystanders acknowledged that reporting was in the best interest of the partner(s) they reported, they also found it difficult to report *because* of their relationship with the victim, and bystanders seemed to perceive reporting as a form of betrayal. While not explicitly mentioned by bystanders, it was apparent that – in these cases – bystanders feared

that negative perceptions of the involved individual(s) regarding their report could potentially also affect their relationship (i.e., resulting in a loss of contact with or sight of the partner(s)).

When bystanders worried about potential repercussions for their relationship – whether it be losing contact or concerns about how their action might be perceived – they often emphasized positive aspects of the person(s) they reported, potentially as a way to counterbalance their action. While their relationship was a reason to report anonymously for both men and women, particularly women expressed positive sentiment about the individual(s) they had a close relationship with. For example, in several cases, women explicitly expressed their support for the victim and emphasized the woman's role as a mother, for example by stating: “[Bystander] states explicitly that she does not have any concerns about [woman's] parenting qualities, but due to her infatuation [with her partner] she is unable to see that her current partner is not good to her.” In other situations, where the concerns specifically related to the children, bystanders sometimes emphasized that the parents did do their best: “[Bystander] says it is not a stable situation for the children at home. [Bystander] says the parents do their best to be there for the children. [...] [Bystander] says that [woman] needs to realize that professional help is needed.” In some cases, bystanders disapproved of the perpetrator's behavior, but also expressed some form of compassion: “[Bystander says] [man] does not mean it in a bad way, [he] was raised like this himself. [Man] always regrets it afterwards.”

In some cases, the involved individuals were upset and disappointed by the report, particularly due to its anonymous nature. For example, in one case, a woman, who did not assume or guess the identity of the bystander who reported and did not deny the situation that was reported, expressed that she found it difficult that someone had reported anonymously, and would have preferred the bystander approach her directly to discuss what she had heard. In another case, where the partners suspected their neighbor of the report, the individuals stated that they did not say or do anything to their neighbor, but “found it terrible that neighbors treat each other this way.” The anonymous reports were sometimes evaluated negatively by the involved partners – who were often also upset by the content of the report and the potential consequences – and it cannot be disregarded that this disappointment may indeed affect the relationship with the bystander who they suspect filed the report or their informal network more generally, regardless of anonymity. Yet, there were also cases in which the anonymous report did not appear to affect the relationship with the bystander, and where the (anonymous) reporting was not perceived negatively. For example, in a case in which the involved individuals suspected that the report

was filed by their neighbor, the individuals mentioned that they would like to meet with their neighbors in order to explain their situation and to express that there is progress and help involved. Though not necessarily tied to *anonymous* reports, there were also cases in which the involved individuals expressed relief as a result of the report. For example, in one case, the victim, who said she was willing to accept any help necessary, expressed hope that the violence would now finally end. As such, while reporting *may* affect the relationship between the bystander and involved individuals – despite anonymity – and may elicit negative evaluation, this does not necessarily have to be the case.

Discussion

Using case files from a domestic violence agency in the Netherlands, I analyzed reports filed by bystanders who reported suspicions of IPV anonymously. While the role of anonymity in reporting criminal or deviant behavior has been analyzed in experimental studies, much remains unknown about the meaning of anonymity among those who actually reported real-life situations, which is particularly important as experimental studies cannot fully capture the complex dynamics of such situations nor the actual relationship of bystanders with the individuals they report about. Similarly, research on bystander intervention in IPV tends to be based on hypothetical reports of what individuals *say* they would do, resulting in a strong need to rely on real-life data to gain insights into their unique experiences (Kuskoff & Parsell, 2024). These bystander perspectives are imperative due to the unique challenges and barriers bystanders experience in relation to their involvement in IPV involvement (Gregory, 2017; Griffin & Worthington, 2023), and understanding their needs is crucial for effectively involving them in efforts to combat IPV.

First, the data revealed that bystanders often sought to deal with the situation informally by offering emotional or practical support and assistance when they became aware of their suspicions prior to relying on authoritative third-party involvement. Bystanders who chose to report to the agency often found themselves in a predicament: Bringing a “private matter” into an institutional arena – where officials possess authority and may intervene in ways that may juxtapose with the priorities of the involved individual(s) – fundamentally transforms the situation at hand (Emerson, 2015). While reporting their suspicions could potentially positively transform the reported situation (i.e., by initiating professional help that may improve safety and prevent further harm), bystanders also faced concerns about negative consequences for themselves and their relationship with the involved

individual(s). As such, anonymity represented a mechanism for bystanders that allowed them to act upon their feelings of responsibility to protect the individual(s) from harm, while simultaneously minimizing their fears relating to their safety and their relationship with the involved individual(s).

By far, the most common reason for bystanders to report anonymously was attributed to the fear for safety, where individuals were afraid of potential consequences for their physical safety from the perpetrator(s). These fears were often related to bystanders' own safety, but – among women – sometimes also extended to the safety of their children. Safety concerns were mostly expressed by neighbors, which could be explained by the fact that they are in close proximity and often witness physical abuse directly (Gregory et al., 2017). These findings align with previous research suggesting that fear of retribution plays an important role in reporting illegal or illegitimate behavior (Hardy, 2019; Rabaiotti & Smith, 2023; Moore & McAuliffe, 2012). In IPV specifically, fear of injury has been identified as the most common barrier for bystanders to intervene in IPV (Weitzman et al., 2020), and bystanders have indeed been found to experience spillover of violence, threats and intimidation from the perpetrator (Gregory, 2017; Gregory et al., 2017). Importantly, anonymity appears to form an essential mechanism that may minimize this fear, and, as such, could lower a crucial barrier associated with reporting IPV and other forms of domestic violence. The data did not indicate that retribution occurred, but this does not mean that retribution can be fully prevented by relying on anonymity, as the involved parties occasionally suspected or discovered the bystander's identity. Since reactions were not always documented in case files, are solely based on what the involved parties mentioned, and may have occurred after the initial contact, it is important for future research to analyze to what extent bystanders' perceived fear aligns with the partners' reactions to both anonymous and non-anonymous reports.

When bystanders had concerns related to their safety, they often based this on various signs: Previous threats, general signs of aggression, unpredictability or – though both only in one case each – prior victimization from the perpetrator(s), or their own temper. Previous threats were occasionally made in relation to bystanders' prior involvement, but sometimes also related to a previous conflict between the bystander and the involved individual(s) (i.e., often a neighborhood quarrel). In other cases, bystanders did not have previous aggressive or threatening encounters, but were aware of their involvement in aggression more generally and/or were afraid because of the perceived unpredictability of the perpetrator(s). Here, not being able to anticipate a potential response to their report – including potential retribution – appeared to make bystanders fearful, which may be explained by the anxiety-

inducting effect of the uncertainty about whether and when a threat occurs (Davies & Craske, 2015).

While fear of retribution against bystanders proved prevalent, there was no mentioning of harm of or retribution against the *victim* within the bystander reports. In addition, this did not emerge as a consequence of the report. However, this does not mean that retribution against the victim does not occur or is not feared; it is possible that this may have occurred but was not known to the agency. Further, fear of retribution against the victim may inhibit bystanders from intervening by reporting. As the data only comprised statements from those who did report – and for the current study, only those who did anonymously – it is unfortunately not possible to examine this further. As such, it is crucial for future research to include victims in determining the effects of (anonymous) reports as well as to examine to what extent fear of retribution may play a role for bystanders themselves, for example by inhibiting intervention.

While most anonymous reports were filed by women, the small sample size precludes us from drawing any conclusions about the extent to which men and women may rely on anonymity. Yet, different patterns in anonymous reporting emerged: Whereas men who feared for their safety often based this on previous threats and made explicit references to violence, women often based their fear on unpredictability and general signs of aggression, expressed more general statements and extended their concerns to their children. While previous research suggests that fear of physical injury is more prevalent – and a stronger barrier to intervene – among women bystanders of IPV compared to men (Weitzman et al., 2020), it is possible that the thresholds for perceiving threats to safety may also vary among men and women. By reporting to an authority, the situation moves from a domestic realm to a public arena, for which the bystander may be held responsible by the perpetrator and/or victim once their identity has become known. By reporting anonymously, women bystanders may enact gendered expectations of providing emotional labor in a domestic realm (Rader, 2023), while simultaneously avoiding the perceived risks associated with openly intervening in IPV. Further, in particular women explicitly expressed their support for the victim, sometimes emphasizing the woman's role as a mother, or – if the concerns were centered on the children – emphasizing that the parents did do their best. By doing so, bystanders provided emotional support and cultivated empathetic feelings, in particular towards women's role as mother (Prentice & Carranza, 2002; Stedker, 2006; West & Zimmerman, 1989). Future studies should examine the implications of anonymity for men and women in greater detail, in particular in terms of their willingness to intervene and their perceived safety

in doing so. In addition, future studies should uncover how gendered expectations related to fear may affect bystander intervention, as the current data do not allow to further untangle this.

Bystanders sometimes feared that reporting to a formal system might have consequences for their relationship – a relationship they valued and in which they often fulfilled a protective role. Specifically, they worried that their report could affect their sight on and/or their contact with the victim (and, if present, the victim's children), and provoke negative evaluation from the involved individual(s), which could potentially also affect their relationship. As victims often do not seek help from official institutions out of shame, stigma, guilt or fear (Montalvo-Liendo, 2008; Naved et al., 2006; Petersen et al., 2005), and their involvement turns a “private” matter into one that occurs in an institutional arena where formal parties possess authority, potentially resulting in legal concerns (Emerson, 2015), involving formal authorities may have consequences for the relationship with the involved parties. Indeed, as the reports that contain suspicions of IPV typically express alignment *against* those called about, victims may distance themselves as they may feel the informal network has engaged in unsolicited action rather than taking their side and being sympathetic towards their needs (Boethius & Akerstrom, 2020; Emerson, 2015). Even though they were not informed about the identity of the bystander who reported, partner(s) sometimes expressed disappointment with the anonymous report filed by someone within their network. Yet, to determine if and how reporting may affect the relationship between the bystander and the involved individual(s) over time, in both anonymous and non-anonymous reports, future research relying on other data is necessary.

Importantly, as argued by McMahon (2024), bystander intervention is often approached as something that is positive and helpful, whereas the consequences for victims are less often considered. While bystanders may perceive anonymous reporting as a form of help that may ultimately benefit the victim, it is essential to acknowledge that this represents the perspective of the bystander, which may not align with the perspectives and needs of the victim. Indeed, studies have found that bystander actions in IPV can lead to various outcomes for victims, ranging from being helpful to not making a difference or resulting in worse outcomes (Casey et al., 2018; Hamby et al., 2016; Hoxmeier & McMahon, 2021; McMahon, 2024; Taylor et al., 2019). While third-party referral to a domestic violence agency may result in relief for victims (Evans & Feder, 2016), anonymous reporting in some cases also resulted in disappointment among victims. Although the data precluded to examine the full range of consequences that victims experienced – as well as the effectiveness

of anonymous reporting –, it is important to acknowledge that victims may not necessarily find (anonymous) reporting helpful, may not want (formal) involvement, or may want to make this decision themselves.

Further, the anonymous nature of these reports may have made victims feel disempowered because they are not directly involved in the process and may have been withheld the opportunity to address the bystanders' concerns directly and/or make their needs known to the bystander, which may contribute to feelings of frustration or a sense of being silenced. Importantly, the emotional impact of the report, including not knowing who was responsible for the report, may also strain their relationship with their network, and may affect their trust in both informal and formal help. Therefore, while bystander reporting may have potentially positive outcomes, it is important to acknowledge that by engaging in (anonymous) reporting to the agency, bystanders may also inadvertently diminish some of the victims' agency and may increase the victim's isolation. As such, it is important for future research to incorporate victims' perspectives and experiences in terms of anonymous reporting to a domestic violence agency. Further, relying on other data sources is necessary to examine if and how reporting may affect the relationship between the bystander and the involved individual(s) over time, in both anonymous and non-anonymous reports.

These findings suggest that anonymous reporting of IPV can be conceptualized as a complex and difficult pathway where bystanders balance the desire to protect the victim(s) from harm with the fear for potential consequences for themselves and/or their relation with the victim(s). Intervention in IPV differs from intervening in, for example, violence in public space, where bystanders typically encounter violence between strangers and where one-time verbal and/or physical intervention may be sufficient in terminating the situation (Emerson, 2015). Reporting anonymously was often combined with other forms of help that preceded or succeeded the report (e.g., emotional support), which tends to exist on a continuum of actions, and was often done when bystanders felt that other options of help were exhausted. While the current study is unable to draw any conclusions about the extent to which anonymous report is perceived as effective – for which victims' perspectives are crucial to consider – the results do reveal that bystanders experience complex dilemmas in relation to their involvement. Although the focus was on anonymous reporting of IPV, the results could potentially also be relevant to other forms of reporting where bystanders maintain some form of relationship with the individual(s) they report about, including other forms of domestic violence and workplace sexual harassment.

Given the dilemmas that bystanders experience – feeling concerned and responsible to act versus wanting to protect their own safety or their relationship – it is important to offer emotional support and guidance for bystanders, in particular for those who fear for potential consequences regarding their involvement. As bystanders' fear makes them less likely to offer support to victims (Goodkind et al., 2003) – and emotional support has been found to be particularly helpful for victims (McMahon, 2024) – it is important to provide bystanders with tools that allow them to continue to offer support to victims. The establishment of community groups for bystanders may be particularly useful in offering support and guidance to bystanders (Latta & Goodman, 2011). This could potentially be achieved through legislation that provides funding and resources for such groups, possibly in collaboration with domestic violence agencies that may offer insights into IPV while simultaneously advising bystanders regarding their involvement.

The availability of anonymous reporting also comes with unique challenges –beyond the potential negative consequences for the victim –, as others may still guess who raised the concerns, it precludes follow-up questions, and it may make it easier to file false reports (Moore & McAuliffe, 2012). Indeed, there were several reports in the initial data collection that were perceived by the agency as false, which were, for the purpose of the current study, excluded from analysis. While the agency has established protocols for anonymous reporting and informs bystanders about the potential negative consequences of anonymity (e.g., further isolation), it is important to meticulously document these reports, including their suspicions and reasons to choose anonymity. As mentioned, in about one third of the anonymous reports, the reason for anonymity remained unknown, and while fear for safety proved to be prevalent among bystanders, the agency oftentimes did not provide substantiation for these concerns. The establishment of clear guidelines in the documentation and verification of anonymous reporting may potentially minimize false accusations, ensure that bystanders' concerns are discussed and potentially acted upon, and may mitigate potential negative consequences for victims. It is important for future research to look into the factors that may play a role in false reporting of domestic violence, as much remains unknown about these types of reports. When bystanders choose anonymity due to severe and substantiated safety concerns, measures may be undertaken to safeguard them from potential retaliation, in particular if their identity is suspected by the involved individuals. It may be worthwhile for domestic violence agencies to assess the risk to bystanders' safety when they choose to report anonymously, and to provide them with adequate protection if their safety is evidently at risk, for example by assigning them to a contact person that they may consult 24/7. While the data used in the current study consisted solely of reports by

those who overcame their concerns for potential consequences of reporting, it is likely that many bystanders may refrain from reporting because of these fears, despite the possibility of anonymous reporting. As such, future research should particularly focus on bystanders who have had suspicions of IPV but who decided *not* to report.

There are several important limitations that merit discussion. First, the case files used for the current study were not compiled for research purposes. Consequently, they sometimes contained limited information, and there was no opportunity to gather additional information from bystanders or involved individuals. In about a third of all anonymous reports that were collected during the initial data collection, there was unfortunately no information about the bystander's decision to report anonymously. Therefore, future research could conduct in-depth interviews with bystanders who reported their suspicions anonymously to gain additional insights into their decision-making processes. While some information on potential consequences of reporting was available, it was not consistently present and typically pertained to reactions shortly after the report. Thus, future studies could explore the long-term implications of potential consequences, particularly concerning fear for safety and the impact on relationships. Further, the data used in this study only reflect the perspectives of bystanders who opted for anonymous reporting. Consequently, the data did not capture the perspectives of those who had suspicions but chose not to report, despite the option of anonymity. In addition, gender of bystanders was based on organizational records, referring to individuals as "man" or "woman", failing to account for gender fluidity and gender identities beyond the binary (Miller, 2002; Valcore & Pfeffer, 2018). Further, as there were no reports on same-sex partners present in the dataset, the current sample only included reports of IPV among heterosexual partners.

Conclusion

Bystanders who decided to involve a domestic violence agency as an authoritative third-party often faced complex dilemmas. Anonymity represented a mechanism for bystanders that allowed them to act upon their feelings of responsibility to protect the individual(s) from harm, while simultaneously minimizing their fears relating to their safety and their relationship with the involved individual(s). While anonymity may take away some of the barriers that bystanders experience in relation to their involvement, it is important for future research to examine if and how anonymity can contribute to victims' safety.

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Chapter 6

Conclusion

Introduction

In this dissertation, I analyzed bystander behavior in violent situations that occurred in public and private spaces. By integrating bystander behavior in gendered violence across these spaces, I aimed to unite these themes and broaden our knowledge of bystander behavior across contexts. In this concluding chapter, I will first summarize the main findings of the dissertation, followed by a discussion of the implications of these findings.¹ Next, I will elaborate on the practical implications of these findings. Further, I will address the limitations of the research in this dissertation and will present avenues for future research. Finally, I will end this dissertation with some concluding remarks.

Summary of the key results

It's 1am on a Saturday night in the inner city of Amsterdam, when Marc suddenly walks up to Stephan in a fast pace and hits him. Before Stephan can retaliate, his friend Lewis intervenes by gently pushing Marc away. Marc's friend, Joost, then wraps his arm around Marc's shoulder, holding him tightly. Lewis positions himself between Marc and Stephan, and starts pointing aggressively at Marc. Right at this time, Marc's friend Ali puts an arm around Stephan's shoulder and appears to talk to him in a calm manner. Stephan then manages to get closer and pushes Marc away. At this moment, two bystanders, Bart and Carl, walk by. They quickly glance at the conflict while walking, but continue their way. A few seconds later, when Marc releases himself and hits Stephan with his fist, Dominic and Jason walk by. Jason pulls out his cellphone and starts recording the conflict, and both Dominic and Jason laugh as the fight develops. Shortly after, three other bystanders – two women, Ariana and Lisa, and one man, Leo – walk by, slow down their pace, and move closer to watch the conflict parties. Ariana, Lisa and Leo continue to remain observant of the conflict, and do not leave the scene until Marc and Stephan have separated after successful bystander intervention. When Ariana, Lisa and Leo walk away from the scene, they look over their shoulders once, but continue to leave when they notice that Marc and Stephan have each left the scene in different directions.²

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1. In doing so, this chapter builds on and uses passages from previously published articles (i.e., previous chapters published as articles).
 2. This example is based on an actual conflict captured on CCTV, with some minor details slightly adapted or added for illustrative purposes. The description of the development of the conflict has been simplified for readability. All names are fictional.

The first part of the dissertation, Chapters 2 and 3, centered on bystander behavior in naturally-occurring conflicts in public space captured on CCTV footage – such as the example illustrated above – and focused on what bystanders *actually* do in real-life violent situations, and how these bystander actions may be associated with gender. While Lewis, Joost and Ali all intervened in the conflict illustrated above, there is quite some variety in how they do so, ranging from physical force to calming touching. While Bart, Carl, Dominic, Jason, Ariana, Lisa, and Leo were all bystanders to the same conflict and did not intervene, we can most likely agree that their behavior looks quite different. As such, the study presented in Chapter 2 first sought to examine the diversity of bystander actions during these conflicts in public space beyond the binary distinction of active versus passive. In the example, several men engaged in physical intervention, another man filmed the conflict, and two women and one man remained observant of the conflict. Yet, if we systematically observe the variety of actions among a large sample of bystanders, do bystanders presenting as men and women really vary in their enactment of these bystander actions in conflicts? By systematically observing how men and women act during conflicts, beyond strength-intensive forms of helping, I aimed to examine the validity and applicability of previously reported gender differences in bystander intervention (e.g., Bennett et al., 2017; Berkowitz et al., 2023; Eagly, 2009; Liebst et al., 2019; Lindegaard et al., 2017), which may advance our scientific understanding of gender and bystander behavior across contexts.

A range of bystander actions were identified, which were categorized into various action categories. The following types of intervention actions were identified: affiliative, physical non-aggressive, physical aggressive, and non-physical aggressive intervention. Further, several types of actions beyond intervention were identified: attentive action (e.g., moving closer), inattentive action (i.e., glancing while moving), and reactive action (e.g., laughing). The analysis showed that, in addition to a range of direct intervention actions, bystanders engaged in attentive actions, inattentive and reactive actions, providing further evidence that – even when not intervening – they often engage in some form of action during conflicts that is far from “passive” (Bloch et al., 2019). Further, the results indicate that bystanders presenting as men were significantly more likely to engage in physical aggressive and non-aggressive intervention. While it was expected that bystanders presenting as women may be more likely to engage in affiliative forms of intervention (e.g., non-forceful touching) than bystanders presenting as men, no significant differences were found. In terms of non-intervention actions, men were more likely to react by laughing, filming or cheering, whereas women were more likely to respond with inattention. Note, however, that the associations were moderately robust, and percentage point

differences were overall relatively small. Overall, the results indicate that bystanders carry out their behavior in conflicts in public space in gendered ways, though these differences were less pronounced than expected based on previous literature (e.g., Eagly, 2009).

Moving on to another example: On a Summer evening in Amsterdam, around 9pm, a man – Johan – and a woman – Anna – are walking together on a busy sidewalk. They appear intimate, walking closely with their arms wrapped around each other. At some point, they stop walking and begin to argue. Johan stands with his back against a building while Anna talks to him, gesturing expressively. Johan then grabs Anna's shoulder, turns her around, pushes her forward, and holds her shoulder forcefully. After a few steps, he lets go, moves his face close to hers, and points aggressively in her face. For several minutes, the conflict continues, with both parties seemingly yelling and gesturing aggressively, and Johan giving Anna several forceful pushes. While they attract considerable attention from bystanders, none of them intervene.³

In this example, reflecting a conflict between a man and a woman with perceived intimate ties, bystanders did not intervene. But what if we were to systematically compare bystander intervention in conflicts between men to conflicts between men and women? And what if we consider perceived intimate ties between conflict parties? Would intervention be more likely in conflicts between a man and a woman who do not appear to be intimate? These questions have particularly been examined in hypothetical scenarios (e.g., Ermer et al., 2021; Felson & Feld, 2009; Moule & Powers, 2021), but rarely in naturally-occurring conflicts. These insights may not only further our understanding of bystander behavior, but are also important to examine whether perceived unsafety of individuals in public space due to bystander passivity is warranted, which, as such, may be useful in tailoring intervention efforts aimed at enhancing public safety. Therefore, in Chapter 3, the CCTV footage was used to examine to what extent the *gender composition* of the conflict parties (i.e., man-man conflicts and man-woman conflicts) was associated with bystander intervention.⁴ In addition, it was considered to what extent perceived intimate ties between conflict parties were associated with bystander intervention.⁵ The likelihood of intervention was tested at both the individual level (i.e.,

3. This example is based on an actual conflict captured on CCTV, with some minor details slightly adapted or added for illustrative purposes. The description of the development of the conflict has been simplified for readability. All names are fictional.

4. There were insufficient conflicts between women present in the data to be included, meaning the analyses were limited to man-man conflicts and man-woman conflicts.

5. Perceived intimate ties were coded for all conflicts, regardless of gender composition, but were only found in conflicts between men and women.

the likelihood that the specific bystander will intervene) and at the situational level (i.e., the likelihood that the victim will receive help because at least someone intervenes).

The results indicate that the likelihood of bystander intervention was *not* associated with the gender composition of the conflict parties at the individual level nor at the situational level. In addition, we did not find interaction effects of bystanders' gender as a moderator on the association between conflict party gender composition and intervention likelihood. As such, there is no statistical evidence that gender composition, by itself, may inhibit or encourage bystander intervention in real-life conflicts in public space. Intervention in public conflicts was more likely than the lack thereof across all types of conflicts at the situational level, suggesting that the likelihood that at least someone will provide help is persistently high, regardless of the victim's or perpetrator's gender presentation. However, while the evidence was not conclusive, the data do point toward some negative effect of perceived intimate ties on the likelihood of intervention, which was non-trivial in magnitude, implying that perceptions of privacy may indeed hinder intervention to some extent compared to other types of conflicts (Ermer et al., 2021; Rogers et al., 2019; Shotland & Straw, 1976). Yet, is it important to further examine this using larger samples that are adequately powered to detect the effect suggested by the data.

Leaving the streets of Amsterdam, we move to the office of *Safe at Home*. It's 2pm when Natalee, after some contemplation, decides to call the domestic violence organization. She is concerned about her neighbor Mona. A few months ago, Mona confided in Natalee that her boyfriend Isaac is abusive, and she fears for her own safety and that of their child. The disclosure did not fully surprise Natalee, who had previously observed Mona's injuries, including bruised eyes and a broken nose. In these last few months, Natalee has been involved in various ways: she assisted Mona in her contact with the police, checks in with her regularly, and they established an emergency code word Mona can use to text Natalee, who will then alert the police. Natalee reports that the physical violence is ongoing, occurring every few weeks, but now seems to have escalated: Mona told her this morning that Isaac strangled her a few days ago. With no professional help involved, and growing concerns for Mona's safety, Natalee does not see any other option than involving *Safe at Home*.⁶

The second part of the dissertation – Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 – centered on bystander behavior in violent situations in private space, derived from bystander reporting of IPV cases to domestic violence agency *Safe at Home*, such as the example illustrated

6. This example is based on an actual case file, with some minor details slightly adapted or added for illustrative purposes. All names are fictional.

above. By relying on case files detailing incidents of IPV reported by bystanders, we gain insights into their experiences and perceptions as reflected in their statement at the time of reporting. While these reports reflect a social interaction in the context of a specific institutional conversation, they nevertheless provide valuable information about how bystanders perceive and react to instances of IPV. In Chapter 4, the focus centered on bystanders' reasons to report their suspicions of IPV, thereby aiming to complement the video data used in this dissertation and previous research relying on vignette designs (e.g., Berkowitz et al., 2023; Ermer et al., 2021), which are both unable to capture the underlying motivations of actual behavior. Further, this chapter investigated if and how such reasons may potentially vary among types of IPV (i.e., *intimate terrorism*, typically perpetrated by men against women, in which violence is used in a pattern of control, and *situational couple violence*, roughly gender-symmetric, and rooted in situational escalation of conflict; Johnson, 1995, 2008) and examined these reasons among men and women.

The findings show that bystanders are willing to report IPV when there is a clear need for help, centering the well-being of victims, which was often done as a last resort and was part of a continuum of actions. In particular, reports were filed when bystanders perceived previous help as ineffective, when there was a recent escalation, or when there was continued unsafety. In cases perceived as *intimate terrorism*, bystanders typically reported when previous attempts to help had failed, and they did so to prevent additional harm, often focusing on the woman victim. In situations perceived as *situational couple violence*, bystanders often reported when they suspected or observed escalation, with the intent of preventing further harm to any children involved. Roughly two-third of bystanders who reported were women, but both men and women reported *intimate terrorism* and *situational couple violence* at similar rates, suggesting that they both may report cases of IPV regardless of whom they perceive as the victim and how they perceive the relationship and the situation. Yet, women more frequently reported cases involving (only) emotional violence, whereas men primarily reported physical violence, often based on direct signs, suggesting some nuances in what bystanders reported, with women potentially recognizing IPV at lower thresholds (Fledderjohann & Johnson, 2012; Hoefnagels & Zwikker, 2001).

Returning to the case of Natalee. During the conversation with *Safe at Home*, Natalee emphasized that she wanted to file her report anonymously. Before making the call, she informed Mona of her intention to report, and Mona approved, hoping this would ultimately improve the situation. Yet, Natalee is concerned about Isaac's reaction if he becomes aware of the fact that she filed a report. Natalee mentions that she fears for her own safety as he might retaliate, given that he does not shy away from the

use of physical violence. By reporting anonymously, Natalee hopes that professional help can be provided, aimed at improving Mona's safety and well-being, while also protecting her own safety.

The study in Chapter 5, relying on real-life case files of IPV, focused on bystanders' reasons to report *anonymously* as a form of intervention. Considering types of intervention that involve formal authorities that offer professional help is important to gain a broader understanding of the diversity of bystander intervention aimed at addressing patterns of IPV as opposed to specific incidents. The results indicate that most bystanders had engaged in various previous actions prior to reporting, but when their concerns remained, they appeared to face a moral dilemma. They had severe concerns and wanted to protect the involved individuals from harm, while simultaneously fearing for consequences as a result of involving a formal institution, which may fundamentally transform the situation (Emerson, 2015). The consequences that bystanders were concerned about related to fear for their safety and fear of losing sight or contact with the victim as a result of their report, in particular when they maintained a close relationship with the victim and – if present – their children. Anonymity allowed bystanders to balance the desire to protect the victim(s) from harm with the fear for potential consequences for themselves and/or their relationship with the victim(s). If bystanders feared for consequences for their relationship, they often also emphasized positive aspects of the person(s) they reported. In particular women, who were responsible for approximately three quarters of anonymous reports, explicitly expressed their support for the victim, sometimes emphasizing the woman's role as a mother, or – if the concerns were centered on the children – emphasized that the parents did do their best. Altogether, the results suggest that anonymity may take away some of the barriers that bystanders experience in relation to their involvement.

Discussion

This dissertation centered on the following overarching question: What role does gender play in bystander behavior in violent situations in public and private spaces? For public spaces, video data was used to analyze what bystanders do during conflicts, while case files were used to examine why bystanders intervene in violent situations in private spaces. Overall, the results suggest that there are some gendered nuances in bystander behavior in violent situations across spaces, albeit not as strong as previous literature has indicated. Specifically, there are gendered nuances in how, by whom and towards whom bystander actions are enacted in violent situations,

which cannot be fully understood without consideration of social constructions of space – the public as ‘dangerous’ and the private as ‘safe’ (Pain, 1997) – reflecting and simultaneously reinforcing gender relations through everyday practices (Koskela, 1999). In the sections that follow, I will further unpack these findings.

Diversity of actions

Despite six decades of research on bystander behavior, the knowledge about *actual* bystander behavior in violence – in particular gendered violence – has remained surprisingly limited. In the bystander literature, laboratory studies have predominantly focused on whether bystanders intervened or not (e.g., Darley & Latané, 1968; Latané & Darley, 1968), whereas the question *what* bystanders actually do has often been forgotten (though see Bloch et al., 2019 for an exception). So, what do bystanders then actually do, based on observations of real-life situations? The results of this dissertation indicate that bystanders – both men and women – engage in a variety of actions in physically violent situations in urban public spaces that challenge our understanding of bystander behavior as a binary concept (Bloch et al., 2019). In IPV, there is also a diversity of intervention actions available that go beyond physical intervention. Bystanders of IPV are typically involved for extended periods of time and tend to engage in a variety of actions, ranging from informal support to involving formal authorities when such support does not suffice. As such, intervention can be seen as a complex pathway, in which bystanders often face difficult dilemmas, and while (anonymous) reporting may initially seem a relatively safe or easy form of intervention, bystanders experience this process as far from easy. As such, observing what bystanders do reveals that their actions could be conceptualized as a continuum of actions – a process – rather than something bystanders either do or do not do, which may not capture the full diversity and complexity of such behaviors. The focus on whether bystanders intervened or not – often using a predefined measure of intervention – may exclude forms of intervention that are less overt. This results in a lack of understanding of what bystanders do when they do not intervene, falsely implying that bystanders who do not intervene are “passive.” To move the field forward, it is important to acknowledge and include the variety of actions available to bystanders that may range from direct intervention (e.g., physical) to (anonymous) reporting across contexts – each important in their own way. Likewise, the results suggest that while some behaviors do not constitute an act of intervention, they are nevertheless meaningful and far from passive, and insights into these behaviors are important to further our understanding of bystander behavior – and helping behavior more generally – in all its complexity.

Gendered bystander behavior

While the body of literature on bystander intervention suggests that there are some gender differences in bystander behavior, this has largely been based on hypothetical reports (e.g., Bennett et al., 2017; Berkowitz et al., 2023). So, if we consider violent real-life situations in public and private spaces, to what extent do we actually see gendered patterns in bystander behavior? Overall, the findings of this dissertation indicate that there are *some* gendered nuances in bystander behavior in violent situations, though these are not as pronounced as would have been expected based on previous literature. More generally, men were significantly more likely to intervene than women in public conflicts, and to engage in physical forms of intervention, thereby enacting gendered expectations of helping behavior that emphasize strength-intensive forms of helping as appropriately masculine behavior (West & Zimmerman, 1987). While it was expected that women would be more likely to engage in affiliative intervention – as a form of nurturing and caring help (Eagly, 2009) – compared to men (see e.g., Lindegaard et al., 2017), no significant differences were found, and in percentage points, more men engaged in affiliative intervention. Men were generally more likely to act in active ways in public space – not only by various ways of intervening but also through other responses such as filming or laughing – whereas women were more likely to engage in inattention. Yet, in the context of IPV, most reports, and particular anonymous reports, were filed by women – though the data did not allow for quantitative analyses – who also expressed greater general concerns underlying their fear for safety, sometimes extending these concerns to their children, and expressing their support for the victim and emphasizing the woman's role as mother. By taking on active roles in these situations, women perform and reinforce expectations that emphasize caregiving behaviors in relation to their responsibility as mothers and caregivers in the home (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Reporting, and in particular anonymous reporting, may be seen as a relatively safe form of intervention, allowing them to act upon their concerns without direct involvement or confrontation (Nicksa, 2014).

As such, while men and women both intervene across contexts, there are some nuances in the contexts in which they do so (public versus private) and in the types of intervention they engage in (physical intervention versus (anonymous) reporting). In this regard, it is important to consider the spatial environments in which these helping behaviors occur, which “shape the ways gender identities and relations are played out, reinforced or modified” (Bondi & Rose, 2003, p. 232). Public space extends beyond a merely physical location; it is a domain where individuals engage in impression management (Goffman, 1959) and one that is inherently tied to visibility (Brighenti, 2007; De Backer, 2019). While being visible to others may increase

helping behavior – as form of impression management (Van Bommel et al., 2012) – it is important to acknowledge the gendered use of public space, in which men tend to experience greater feelings of belonging, whereas women experience more limited spatial freedom (De Backer, 2019). In particular in the night-time economy – in which the vast majority of conflicts in public space in the sample occurred – women have been found to feel more powerless because it is occupied less frequently by other women (Valentine, 2001). Previous research suggests that individuals use ‘cues for alarm’, such as men who are strangers, poor visibility and darkness, to act upon feelings of vulnerability (Nasar & Fisher, 1992), and women are generally more likely to act to do so by engaging in avoidance and constrained behavior (Tomsich et al., 2011). By employing such strategies, such as avoiding strangers, this may alleviate women of their feelings of unsafety, thereby allowing them to inhabit such spaces (Roberts et al., 2019, 2022). Yet, for men – though not all men – navigation through public space often involves less concerns about (perceived) safety, and rather than being tied to avoidance or exclusion, the enactment of actions that are visible to others – in particular those that display fearlessness or physical strength – may become increasingly important and potentially status generating (Day et al., 2003). Yet, in private spaces – and through indirect forms of intervention – bystander intervention remains largely invisible to others, and potentially does not elicit the same extent of social recognition. The invisibility of intervention in private spaces parallels the broader phenomenon of invisible work, including unpaid household labor and unpaid practices in the work place, as well as emotional labor, which is still to large extent carried out by women, tied to the enactment of gendered expectations of care activities (Guy & Newman, 2004; Kaplan, 2022). Despite these gendered nuances, it is important to recognize that women also demonstrate agency in public space and actively negotiate their presence in these spaces (Roberts et al., 2019; Vera-Gray, 2018), and men also engaged in intervention behaviors in private spaces that may not be visible to others. As such, although there is an overall gendered pattern, within-gender variation in these intervention behaviors should also be considered.

Intervention in gendered violence

What about the often-assumed risk of bystander passivity in gendered violence in public space, spurred by the Kitty Genovese case? Is this justified? The results of this dissertation indicate that the often-assumed risk of bystander passivity is, in fact, *not* accurate. While it was already known that bystander intervention – contrary to common belief – is common during violent encounters in public space (see Philpot et al., 2020), the findings of this dissertation provide evidence that almost *everyone* who finds themselves in a violent encounter in public space is likely to receive help. This means that women who find themselves in violent situations in public space *are* likely to

receive help from others, contesting persistent myths of public unsafety and bystander passivity. Further, the results suggest that intervention across gender compositions was not influenced by bystanders' gender, suggesting that intervention may not necessarily be a case of "men's protection of women," (e.g., Felson & Feld, 2009; Rogers et al., 2019) but rather of impartial helping directed at someone in need of help. While the *likelihood* of intervention does not differ depending on the gender composition in conflicts, *how* bystanders intervene may nevertheless differ (e.g., offering support to the woman while targeting the man; Ejbye-Ernst et al., 2022a; Rogers et al., 2019). Nevertheless, this offers a radically different and much more nuanced – and optimistic – view of public safety. After all, for decades, millions of women have read the case of Kitty Genovese as a truth and have been led to believe that, if they were to ever encounter a similar situation, they were unlikely to receive help from others (Hengehold, 2011). This finding not only furthers our scientific understanding, but is also crucial in light of navigation in public space, as perceptions of public unsafety may limit how individuals use and occupy public space, which may reinforce gendered divisions of space.

So, what if conflicts between men and women occur between perceived intimate ties in public space? Would that influence the likelihood of bystander intervention? Based on previous research, it was expected that intervention would be less likely in intimate conflicts (Ermer et al., 2021; Rogers et al., 2019; Shotland & Straw, 1976). The observations of public conflicts do reveal a small tendency towards less intervention in conflicts between perceived intimate ties, though this was not statistically clear and not as pronounced as expected based on previous literature. As such, while intervention was still common in these types of conflicts, perceptions of privacy may indeed hinder intervention to some extent compared to other types of conflicts. It is possible that, in these situations, bystanders may feel that their involvement is unwarranted and that intervening may be perceived as intrusive by the involved individuals (Ermer et al., 2021). As such, it is important for bystanders – both professionals and citizens – to recognize how such conflicts may emerge, and for future research to further our scientific understanding of bystander behavior in these specific situations.

What role do bystanders play in violence that occurs in "private" spaces, where women are particularly at risk? The results of this dissertation suggest that bystanders can – and do play – an active role in IPV, not only by involving formal authorities that may offer professional help, but also by their continuous engagement through informal help which often preceded or co-occurred with reporting and was driven by empathy and concern for the victim and/or the children. While it was not possible to analyze the IPV case files quantitatively, bystanders reported IPV situations in which they

perceived men as perpetrators, men and women both as perpetrators, and women as perpetrators (though a limited number of reports), suggesting that bystanders found situations involving varying gender compositions severe enough to report. Although the data and qualitative design require caution in interpreting the findings, the results provide further evidence for the potential of bystander involvement in IPV. Despite IPV often, but not exclusively, occurring in residential settings, it is important to approach IPV as a public matter that not only affects the victim and children in the home, but also the broader informal network.

Overall discussion

What, then, do these results imply? Should we look at gender as a key factor in explaining bystander behavior? These results imply that gender is *not* an all-encompassing explanation for how bystanders act in violent situations. The findings suggest that bystanders do intervene when necessary, aligning with the idea that intervention is a relatively common human response (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 2017; Fry, 2000; Liebst et al., 2019) – not only by whom it is performed, but also towards whom. Despite some variation in who, when and how they intervene, these findings provide a much more nuanced view compared to previous vignette research, which may overestimate certain gender differences in intervention behavior (Mainwaring et al., 2022). Vignette designs are likely unable to capture the *complexity* of the context in which bystander intervention occurs (Nabi et al., 2002), and may not be fully equipped to capture specific situational and relational dynamics, the dilemmas (e.g., the desire to protect the victim but also their own safety), and the potential consequences (e.g., retribution) that emerge in naturally-occurring situations. Additionally, vignette studies are often conducted among college students, reflecting perceptions and attitudes of a specific demographic group that is not generalizable, with well-educated individuals tending to overestimate certain biases (e.g., Schaeffer et al., 2023; Stewart-Williams, 2002). While the use of vignette studies has been valuable in advancing our knowledge on bystander behavior in violent situations, it is imperative to complement this body of research with real-life observations, as these findings may not only diverge from actual behaviors, but may also exacerbate and reinforce gender disparities that may be more nuanced and multifaceted in real-life contexts. As such, to further our scientific understanding of bystander behavior, gender and real-life violent situations, it is imperative for research to prioritize the use of real-life data.

Importantly, if and how bystanders intervene depends on various additional aspects, including situational aspects, such as, for instance, the severity of the situation and the (in)effectiveness of previous help, and there is large individual

variation. Nevertheless, the *inclusion* of gender in research on bystander behavior in violence is necessary if we aim to gain a comprehensive understanding of diverse bystander across situations. While it is important to acknowledge the potential for reproducing existing biases by focusing on gender, excluding gender carries the risk of perpetuating male-dominated perspectives and gender biases in research, which could lead to inaccurate or oversimplified findings that further reinforce these biases. For example, the traditional focus on men as participants in medical research has resulted in substantial data gaps, impacting the effectiveness of evidence-based medicine (Holdcroft, 2007). Further, recent insights indicate that some commonly-held beliefs about gender in past research may have been oversimplified. For example, for decades it was believed that early humans had a labor division in which men primarily did the hunting and women the gathering, leading individuals to believe that certain labor roles are “natural.” Yet, recent evidence – relying on the original ethnographic reports rather than summaries thereof – suggests that in 79% of societies for which data were available, women were hunting and often pursued big mammals typically associated with men hunters, challenging this binary division (Anderson et al., 2023). Failure to consider the diversity of actions that bystanders engage in may result in an inaccurate picture that could reinforce false narratives. For example, in the aftermath of World War II in the Netherlands, appreciation of resistances fighters focused on the overt, often armed, acts of resistance by men, whereas women’s involvement was either neglected or reduced to supporting work. Yet, research has uncovered that women actually made up a large portion of resistance fighters, and have contributed in essential ways, without which much of the resistance work would not have been possible in the first place (Schwegman, 2016).

In the context of bystander behavior in violent situations, this means we should not exclusively look at bystander behavior in public space – where helping behavior is more visible –, but also in other contexts, including in “private” spaces. This also means that we should broaden our understanding of intervention, and *acknowledge* the variety of actions available to bystanders that go beyond direct or strength-intensive forms of intervention, including affiliative actions and reporting. In doing so, it is important to reconsider how we view bystander intervention and the value that tends to be placed on “heroic” bystander intervention, typically emphasizing strength-intensive forms of helping. Yet, other forms of intervention, including providing support or involving authorities, remain underacknowledged, even though bystanders experience their involvement in IPV as challenging and may also put themselves at risk. As such, it is important to shift the narrative to bystanders as *active*, and to recognize their agency, regardless of their gender presentation and regardless of the context in which they intervene. The inclusion of gender in research

on bystander behavior also means that we need to incorporate a more gender-inclusive approach that goes beyond the binary of men and women, and consider the experiences of other gender identities, who continue to remain underrepresented in research. In particular, we need to honor the variation of actions available to bystanders across contexts to truly understand what bystanders do and why they do so, and acknowledge how such actions may occur in gendered ways. In a field that – similar to other disciplines in science – has traditionally focused on men as research subjects, the inclusion of women and other gender identities – both as (proactive) bystanders and as victims and/or perpetrators – is crucial to fully understanding bystander behavior in all its facets.

Practical and policy implications

Sixty years after the tragic murder of Kitty Genovese, it is evident that the narrative surrounding bystander intervention requires radical revision. As mentioned, this dissertation provides further evidence for individuals as active – rather than passive – bystanders in violent incidents both in public and private. As the myth of bystander passivity continues to dominate public perceptions, there are several efforts that can be undertaken to change the narrative of public unsafety, including the way media report about violent crime. Compared to crime statistics, a disproportionate amount of news reports focuses on men assaulting women unknown to them (Condon et al., 2007; Mason & Monckton-Smith, 2008; Naylor, 2001). These stories reinforce the narrative of men as potentially violent and women as potential victims, emphasizing the public sphere as one that is unsafe for women. Importantly, the false narrative of bystander passivity – exacerbated by news reports about severe yet rare instances in which bystanders did not (successfully) intervene – may lead individuals, and women in particular, to believe that they are not only at risk for ‘stranger danger,’ but will additionally not receive any help from bystanders. As such, there is a responsibility for media outlets to add nuance to their news coverage by avoiding sensationalism of certain cases, accurately reflecting crime statistics, emphasizing that lack of intervention is relatively uncommon or showcasing stories of bystander intervention in emergencies.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the bystander effect continues to be perceived as one of the most established findings in social psychology, and is still regularly mentioned in psychology textbooks. With recent evidence challenging this assumption, and the current study providing further evidence for the active role of bystanders in violent situations, it is important to incorporate these recent insights and to shift away from

the framing of bystanders as passive. For sixty years, research has been conducted based on the assumption that people are unlikely to intervene when they are in groups, departing from an oversimplified translation of the bystander effect, and this image has still not been fully corrected. Research has primarily been occupied with the likelihood of intervention and the effect of other bystanders – often assuming passivity – rather than observing what bystanders actually do and why they do so in specific situations, and how other bystanders can be utilized as helpful resources rather than passive onlookers. Consequently, researchers have a responsibility to pose diverse questions in terms of bystander behavior and to consider these nuances in future research. Further, incorporating recent insights in social sciences curricula is necessary to encourage future scholars to address research questions that advance our scientific and practical understanding of the utility of *active* bystanders in violent emergencies.

Despite the active role of bystanders, many violence reduction programs that target bystanders have been designed from the perspective that the presence of other bystanders forms a barrier that must be overcome (Levine et al., 2020). Indeed, several current bystander programs in the Netherlands operate from the perspective that bystanders tend to be passive or apathetic (e.g., Fairspace, 2024). As such, it is important for bystander programs to shift their focus to utilizing additional bystanders as valuable resources that can facilitate collective bystander action (Levine et al., 2020). These rather optimistic findings – indicating victims of aggression in public space *are* likely to receive help from others, regardless of their gender presentation – may positively impact individuals' feelings of public safety and may subsequently influence how they navigate themselves through public space. It may be useful for bystanders to know that bystander actions can each be helpful in their own way, and that they are at relatively low risk of victimization (Liebst et al., 2019). As such, communicating these insights to citizens may be useful in enhancing public understanding of bystander intervention and public safety more generally, for example through national campaigns. This is particularly important because public space continues to remain a spatial environment where women and other gender identities, on average, feel less safe and that may be less accessible, thereby reinforcing the gendered division of space and upholding the status quo (Kern, 2020).

Recently, there has been growing awareness to various forms of gender-based violence, and actions that may have once been overlooked or perceived as acceptable, such as street harassment, workplace harassment, and (other) forms of sexual harassment, are increasingly recognized as unsafe and harmful, which is important given its high prevalence – often underreported – and severe impact on victims. Efforts have

been undertaken to increase visibility for these forms of violence and the need for a culture change, for example through the appointment of a Government Commissioner for Sexual Transgressive Behavior and Sexual Violence [Regeringscommissaris]. In recent campaigns, action plans, and trainings, the potential of bystanders has been increasingly recognized in these forms of violence. Yet, the actions of bystanders in these forms of violence have not been extensively studied yet, and there is a strong need for future studies based on real-life data to examine what bystanders (can) do in these various forms of violence, and what actions are perceived as effective. It is important that such programs targeting or including bystanders are evidence based, and that they are evaluated on their effectiveness, as the practical effectiveness of programs tends to be mixed (Levine et al., 2020). In addition, the increased focus on the inclusion of bystanders also comes with challenges that should not be ignored. By focusing on bystanders exclusively, we may neglect victim's agency and resilience, and fail to acknowledge that victims can be assertive and may not need or want bystander involvement. Therefore, it is essential to incorporate victims in these plans and consider how we can enhance their assertiveness alongside encouraging bystander involvement in a way that aligns with victims' needs. At the same time, the focus on bystanders may divert attention from the accountability of offenders, and might not address the root causes of violence. As such, it is important to not only allocate resources to bystanders, but to continue involving victims and offenders in these efforts.

As IPV often remains undetected by authorities – meaning professional help to increase safety and well-being may not be offered and IPV may in some occasions not be terminated without such help – bystanders can be helpful by providing informal help or support or by involving formal help that may offer such services. While this is not to say that the involvement of formal authorities is *always* the best course of action – and it is important to acknowledge victims' autonomy and agency when it comes to seeking help – bystanders can play an important role in involving professional help that centers on safety and well-being when informal help does not suffice. While the results indicate that bystanders who intervene in IPV by reporting tend to be actively involved in various ways, the results also suggest that bystanders have often been aware of the situation for some time, often report when they feel there are no any other possibilities left, and do not take the involvement of authorities lightly. As such, it may be particularly useful to provide bystanders with a variety of specific tools to facilitate intervention and ongoing support. For example, offering advice on how to initiate dialogues (e.g., how bystanders can start up a conversation with the victim and/or perpetrator if they suspect IPV) and enhancing public understanding of the complexities of IPV (e.g., the difficulties for victims to leave) can be beneficial, as bystanders often feel responsible but find it

difficult to determine their course of action. Public awareness of what constitutes IPV—including emotional violence, which men may be less likely to recognize—can help individuals identify IPV in its early stages and reduce potential barriers related to reporting and other forms of intervention. As those who intervene frequently face complex dilemmas and are affected by the situation themselves, it is crucial for policy and practice to acknowledge their challenging position and provide them with platforms or initiatives that focus on their well-being, for example through community support groups that specifically focus on bystanders.

In addition, it is important to acknowledge that while there may be some gendered patterns in bystander intervention, these tend to be context-specific, and there is a wide array of helping behaviors available to bystanders that extend beyond physical forms of helping. There is also a lot variation in bystander actions *within* groups, and there is not one appropriate form of action that should be utilized. As such, it is important for policy efforts to emphasize this variety of bystander behaviors – including, for example, practical help, consolatory touching and reporting to authorities – and to offer potential bystanders with a toolbox of actions that they may draw on across various contexts. This not only applies to situations of violence, but also to other forms of emergencies, such as accidents, where bystanders could offer help beyond medical assistance. By increasing individuals' awareness to the various roles that they can take on – that go far beyond physical intervention – this may potentially diminish some of the barriers that bystanders may experience. As mentioned earlier, this also means that the narrative of what constitutes bystander intervention or helping more generally should not disproportionately focus on and prioritize strength-intensive forms of helping, but, instead, should honor the various ways in which individuals can intervene.

In light of these various ways in which individuals can intervene, it is important to acknowledge anonymous reporting as a form of intervention that may be potentially useful for bystanders in certain circumstances. While this dissertation did not focus on the effectiveness of anonymous reporting, the results indicate that anonymity may provide bystanders the opportunity to intervene when they fear for their own safety and/or affecting their relationship with the individual(s) they report, who otherwise may have refrained from intervening. In situations where bystanders have an ongoing relationship with the individual(s) involved, which they want or have to continue despite their intervention, being able to remain anonymous could be beneficial, in particular in situations where bystanders can serve an important role in signaling such forms of behavior (e.g., domestic violence, workplace harassment). Fear for safety plays an important role for many bystanders, and anonymity seems to serve as

a way to mitigate these fears. Importantly, the limitations of anonymous reporting should not be overlooked (e.g., risk of false reporting), and much more research is necessary to determine if, how and under what conditions anonymous reporting may be an effective means. While there are various options for anonymous reporting in the Netherlands, including at Safe at Home but also *Meld Misdaad Anoniem* [Report Crime Anonymously], there is surprisingly little knowledge of its effectiveness and its meaning to bystanders who have actually relied on these reporting channels. As such, anonymous reporting deserves further elaboration in future research, and could – if found to be effective, in particular from the victims’ perspective – potentially be used in other contexts and/or countries.

Limitations

While this dissertation provides novel insights into gendered bystander behavior in various violent contexts, there are several limitations and avenues for future research that should be addressed.

Limitations of CCTV footage

The first part of the dissertation focused on bystander behavior in real-life conflicts in public space, relying on CCTV footage of naturally occurring conflicts in Amsterdam, the Netherlands collected by the Municipality (Chapter 2 and 3). The unique nature of the data allowed for the observation of bystander behavior in violent incidents on the spot, as opposed to laboratory experiments focusing on general situations or vignette designs, resulting in a high ecological validity. However, this approach also comes with important shortcomings that deserve further elaboration.

In terms of gender, the use of CCTV footage holds as an implication that we can observe how individuals present themselves in public space, thereby focusing on gender *presentation*. Although gender identity and gender presentation are interrelated, with individuals often seeking alignment between the two (Lenning, 2009), they represent distinct phenomena. Through their gender presentation, individuals may publicly perform and display their experienced gender identity (e.g., through their appearance), but – as we do not have any insights into individuals’ self-identified gender – it is possible that individuals were coded based on observed cues of gender presentation that may not match their experienced gender identity. Importantly, gender self-identification cannot be captured using a binary approach and it is important to acknowledge the fluidity of gender (Miller, 2002; West & Zimmerman, 1987). While we included a code “other” to account for observed cues of

gender presentation that may not fit with presenting as “man” or “woman” – which was not observed – it is important to acknowledge that the approach used in the dissertation does not do justice to gender diversity. This reflects a larger tendency within research on bystander intervention, in which gender identity and biological sex are often used interchangeably (i.e., often capturing sex but not gender identity), only binary gender identities are included and/or diverse gender identities are removed or combined due to small sample sizes (see Hoxmeier et al., 2022). While the data allowed us to analyze in-detail variation in how individuals engage in actual helping behavior and the potential association with gender presentation in public space – allowing us to understand variability within and across contexts, with gender prescriptions varying across situations and individuals adapting their practices in accordance with these expectations (Luyt, 2013) – it is important for future research to consider both gender identity and gender presentation (Lenning, 2009; Luyt, 2013), and to incorporate a gender-diverse approach to bystander behavior (Hoxmeier et al., 2022; Kirk-Provencher et al., 2023).

Further, there was limited diversity in the gender composition of the conflicts, with the majority of included conflicts occurring between men. As conflicts between women were rare in the sample, they unfortunately could not be analyzed due to an insufficient number of videos. This means that we do not have any insights into how bystanders act in conflicts between women, and if and to what extent this may influence bystander actions. As previous research suggests that violence between women tends to be constructed as ineffective and irrational – and as less severe as between men (e.g., Cobbina et al., 2010) – it would be interesting to examine if that is also reflected in how bystanders actually *act* during these conflicts. This is particularly important because previous research has often focused on violence between men (e.g., in public space) or on violence between men and women (e.g., sexual violence, IPV), whereas we actually know very little about bystander behavior during violent encounters between women in public space – not only limiting our scientific understanding of bystander behavior across diverse situations but also leaving out a group of individuals that has traditionally less often been included in violence research (see for exceptions e.g., Cobbina et al., 2010; Miller, 2008).

In addition to gender composition, Chapter 3 included cues of intimate ties between conflict parties and its potential association with bystander intervention. The inclusion of this measure offers novel insights based on unique data that complements previous research that particularly focused on vignettes or surveys. Yet, it is important to mention that there was a relatively low number of conflicts that appeared to occur between intimate ties in public space, potentially making our

confirmatory tests underpowered to identify possible effects at the situational level (note that, at the individual level, this issue does not arise). While a supplementary analysis was conducted on a larger sample to address potential power issues, the results remain somewhat inconclusive. As such, it is important for future research to replicate this using a larger sample at the situational level.

Further, cues of intimate ties were only observed between men and women, as such leaving out the possibility to analyze whether conflicts between intimate ties influences bystander intervention across gender compositions. Therefore, it remains unknown whether the pattern of less intervention in conflicts between men and women who are perceived to maintain intimate ties would be similar in same-gender intimate conflicts. While several studies have relied on vignette designs to examine bystander intervention in violent situations across various gender compositions (e.g., Pagliaro et al., 2021), this has rarely been studied using real-life conflicts. As such, it may be worthwhile for future research to collect additional data that reflects a larger diversity in terms of gender composition in perceived intimate conflicts. In addition, it is important to extend research on bystander actions to other forms of intimacy, including, for example, child-parent conflicts in public space.

Relying on CCTV footage additionally holds as an implication that we cannot verify the existence of intimate ties between conflict parties. While the coding procedure was done in a meticulous way – by using a predefined measure based on previous literature, testing the ethogram, and testing inter-rater reliability – we cannot be certain that the assigned codes of the absence or presence of intimate ties is accurate. Yet, previous research suggests that observers tend to be very accurate in discerning social relationships (Liebst et al., 2023), and – despite not knowing the factual existence of intimate ties – it is likely that such cues tend to be recognized by the individuals present in the conflict in similar ways.

In addition, it important to mention that, in this dissertation, the focus was primarily on individual bystander actions. Yet, it is clear from previous studies relying on video footage that bystander behavior in natural situations does not occur in isolation, but instead is the result of interactional processes between individuals who perform collaborative efforts (Bloch et al., 2018; Levine et al., 2011; Pallante et al., 2022; Weenink et al., 2022). In Chapters 2 and 3, several important situational aspects were included as control variables – including severity, intervention by others and the gender composition of the group of bystanders – but these studies did not consider how bystanders acted in a collaborative effort. As such, it is important to acknowledge that to truly *understand* the actions of individual bystanders – including

actions beyond intervention – we need to consider how and when these actions occur in relation to those of other bystanders, including how bystanders who present as men and women may engage in collaborative action.

In addition, an inherent implication of using video footage is that it is limited to *observing* what individuals do. The footage does not offer insights into their thoughts, perceptions and feelings, leaving us unable to examine their internal decision-making processes during such situation. Relatedly, while bystander behavior is context-specific and dependent on situational aspects of conflicts (e.g., the degree of severity, what other bystanders do; Liebst et al., 2019; Ejbye-Ernst et al., 2022b), it is not possible to consider non-observable individual characteristics that may additionally play a role in explaining individual bystander behavior. While this is inevitable with the use of CCTV data, future research could potentially address these limitations by triangulation of multiple data sources (Lindegard & Bernasco, 2018). For example, future studies could integrate police case files that provide additional information or combine CCTV footage with interviews from on-site bystanders to bridge this gap and to combine observational work with more in-depth reflections.

Further, a certain selection bias in the videos that were included cannot be disregarded (Lindegard & Bernasco, 2018). First, there is a bias in the locations where CCTV cameras are placed, which involve disturbances of public order, such as nightlife areas, drug dealing areas, youth hang-out spots, shopping areas, and tourist areas. As such, conflicts that occur in other areas in Amsterdam where such disturbances are potentially less prevalent do not get captured on camera. Further, the camera operators usually only note down potentially criminal offenses, but were, for the overarching project on bystander behavior in conflicts, instructed to additionally include low-level incidents (e.g., agitated gesturing). While the employees were provided with specific behavioral cues and have been visited repeatedly in order to discuss which situations to include (see Ejbye-Ernst, 2022), we cannot assess whether the selection may have been biased or whether the employees prioritized certain conflicts over others.

In addition, the CCTV footage, by its nature, lacks sound. As a result, we are unable to capture the conflict in its full context – and, as such, do not have the same information as the bystanders who are present –, and are unable to capture verbal bystander behaviors. Although verbal expressions tend to be accompanied by non-verbal behaviors (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 2017), which may still have been captured through the ethograms (e.g., gesturing), the inclusion of sound would have provided much greater detail into bystander behavior during these conflicts.

Limitations of case files

The case files that were used in Chapters 4 and 5 provided insights into bystander perspectives that may be difficult to capture otherwise, but nevertheless come with important shortcomings. First of all, the case files were comprised of information as registered by employees, and reflected bystander statements as written down by the employee. As such, these statements consist of bystanders' explanations that are constructed during their specific interactions with the employee. Further, while employees are trained in writing up information, and bystanders have to approve of the write-up of their statement, it is not possible to verify these statements or to ask follow-up questions. As such, it is possible that certain information may have not been captured. In addition, in terms of individuals' gender, this was based on the descriptions of employees, which may not fully capture individuals' gender identity.

In Chapter 4, several types of IPV (i.e., *intimate terrorism* and *situational couple violence*) were included based on the statements of bystanders, as such based on the information available to them, but it should be acknowledged that this may not necessarily accurately reflect the dynamics of IPV. Further, reports involving women as perpetrators were excluded due to their low frequency and the insufficient detail to distinguish between *intimate terrorism* and *situational couple violence* in these cases. However, this does not mean that women cannot engage in *intimate terrorism* or that men are rarely victims of IPV. As men as victims are often underrepresented in IPV research, it is crucial to analyze bystander responses in these situations, in particular because men's victimization tends to be perceived differently and remains underreported (Dutton & White, 2013). In addition, the case files were only comprised of heterosexual relationships, resulting in an inability to consider bystander behavior in LGBTQ+ relationships due to its absence in the collected data.

Finally, while the focus on bystander perspectives is crucial in terms of identifying *why* they intervene by reporting and by reporting anonymously, it is essential to acknowledge that this represents the perspective of the bystander – shared at a certain moment in time –, which may not align with the perspectives and needs of the victim. While reports that were perceived as false by the agency were excluded from analysis, the data do not allow us to examine to what extent the reports, as made by the bystander, are factually accurate. It is important to acknowledge that victims may not necessarily find (anonymous) reporting helpful, may not want (formal) involvement, or may want to make this decision themselves, and their own perspectives are important to include. As such, despite the advantages of these data, there are also important limitations that should be addressed in future studies.

Future research avenues

While this dissertation offers novel insights into bystander behavior in violent encounters, it also raises additional research questions that are important to address in future research. Thus, this work serves as a starting point, which will hopefully result in additional studies that can delve deeper into some of these findings or rely on similar data sources to uncover new findings in different settings. Given the numerous potential directions for future research, I will focus on overarching avenues for future research and refer to the previous chapters for more specific suggestions.

First, future research may – more generally – benefit from conceptualizing bystander behavior as a spectrum of actions rather than applying a narrow definition of intervention that is either present or absent or conflating acts of non-intervention with passivity. Acts that may not fit with measures of intervention, such as attentive actions, may nevertheless be functional, and it would be interesting to analyze how acts *beyond* intervention (e.g., watching, filming) may impact how violent situations evolve and under which circumstances these actions occur. These actions are rarely included in research on bystander behavior, but – given their prevalence and potential importance – it is essential for future research to examine these in greater detail and to gain an understanding of *why* bystanders engage in these various actions beyond intervention. For example, *why* do bystanders stop to watch a(n) (violent) emergency? In what situations do bystanders film or laugh, and why do they do so? This could not only be examined among conflicts in public space, but potentially also in other forms of emergencies, which would strengthen our understanding of diverse bystander behavior. In terms of research on bystander *intervention*, it is important for future studies to include actions that may not be confrontational or strength-oriented, and to do so across various contexts, to fully capture the diversity of bystander intervention. To advance theory development, it is additionally important to conduct within-person comparative designs for an understanding of *why* the same individual intervenes in some instances, but not in others. This can also be extended to conflicts and violence more broadly. For example, how does violence unfold over time in the lives of the same individuals, and in what situations does this occur?

Further, there is still lots to uncover in terms of gendered bystander behavior in conflicts in public and private space, including the dynamics and interactional processes of these actions. While the results suggest that there are some gendered nuances in individual bystander behavior, it remains unknown under what specific conditions these nuances play out. Yet, as women's likelihood of intervention appears to be reduced in male-dominated groups (Levine & Crowther, 2008), it would be

interesting to analyze how men and women collaborate in their intervention efforts, and to what extent the gender composition of the group of bystanders may influence bystander actions. Future research should further unpack this by considering a qualitative analysis of the development of these behaviors or a sequential analysis that incorporates such interactional processes. Doing so would provide further context of these behaviors, and insights into how bystanders work together – including gender dynamics – would advance our understanding of collective bystander behavior.

The results of this dissertation suggest that fear proves to be an important theme. For bystanders reporting IPV, fear for their safety often played an important role in the decision to report anonymously, and it is likely that fear for safety may also inhibit bystanders from intervening, both in public and private spaces. Although the fear paradox has been extensively studied, there is less understanding of how gendered fear *specifically* shapes bystander behavior across different spaces. For example, what specifically do bystanders fear regarding intervention in public space, and under what conditions does this fear inhibit intervention? How do bystanders overcome this fear in public spaces? Do women who intervene in violent situations in public space have different perceptions of fear in public spaces? And what about the fear of retribution among bystanders in IPV?

While the data indicated less intervention in public conflicts between men and women who were perceived as intimate ties, it is important to replicate this using a larger dataset. Additionally, it is important to not only focus on the likelihood of intervention, but also to gain a more detailed understanding of intervention behavior in public conflicts between men and women. For example, what characterizes conflicts between intimate ties where bystanders do not intervene? How do other factors – such as who initiated the conflict or whether the violence is one-sided or mutual – influence whether and how bystanders intervene in conflicts between men and women?

Since it was not possible to conduct a systematic comparison of bystander intervention in IPV across men and women, future research could collect additional data to examine to what extent men and women may vary in both their awareness of IPV and their subsequent intervention behavior. Importantly, this dissertation exclusively focused on bystanders who intervened by reporting IPV, while there is undoubtedly a substantially large portion of IPV cases that remain unreported. Therefore, it is essential for future research to include bystanders who were aware but did *not* intervene to gain insights into potential barriers they may experience and how these can be overcome. This not only contributes to our scientific understanding

of *why* bystanders do not intervene under certain circumstances, but is also necessary in light of policy efforts. After all, if we do not know *why* they do not intervene, how can we motivate them to do so – if we even should? Conducting in-depth interviews with bystanders of IPV could be useful in gathering additional knowledge on their perspectives, experiences, and needs. As this dissertation did not consider to what extent bystander actions (e.g., reporting) are effective, it is important to examine to what extent reporting and other forms of intervention are perceived as helpful. In particular, it is important for future research to include the perspectives of victims, and uncovering what actions victims find helpful should be an integral part of bystander intervention strategies. The inclusion of victims in bystander research does not only offer another – necessary – perspective, but is also crucial in ensuring that efforts are rooted in the experiences of those who are directly impacted.

While the body of research on IPV has increasingly recognized the importance of bystanders, previous studies – in particular vignette designs among college students – have often focused on friends, acquaintances, or strangers as bystanders. By focusing on college students, we not only focus on IPV occurring among a specific population that is not generalizable (Kuskoff & Parsell, 2023), but we also fail to capture the experiences and perspectives of other groups of bystanders. As such, it may be worthwhile to expand our conceptualization of bystanders in future research, and to include other (groups of) individuals who may additionally be aware or involved. In this dissertation, bystanders who intervened by reporting consisted in particular of neighbors, suggesting that neighbors are important to consider in future research and policy efforts. Further, while it goes without saying that children who are exposed to IPV in their homes are victims themselves, it is important to recognize that they are not passive, with recent research providing further evidence for the active role that children take on to protect their parent(s), for example by intervening (Van Baak & Eichelsheim, forthcoming). In addition, professionals in the Netherlands, such as teachers, healthcare providers, and social workers, have a legal obligation to report domestic violence and child maltreatment, positioning them as professional bystanders. Yet, there is surprisingly limited understanding of the experiences of these professional bystanders, despite evidence indicating low rates of reporting in, for example, child maltreatment (Ridderbos-Hovingh et al., 2020). As such, it is important to consider how various bystanders act in various forms of domestic violence. By failing to include the diversity of bystanders that are aware and/or involved, we risk overlooking their experiences and perspectives. Yet, these perspectives do not only enhance our scientific understanding of the roles that various bystanders play, but are also necessary if we aim to target these forms of violence, which is crucial in terms of preventing or mitigating the negative

consequences thereof, including the intergenerational transmission of violence (Ehrensaft et al., 2003). Specifically, future research could complement previous vignette studies by relying on real-life data, including administrative data and interviews, to ensure that insights are rooted in the experiences from those actually involved. As the findings indicate that bystanders of IPV tend to engage in various actions over time, it is important for future research to consider intervention as a complex process rather than an isolated action. As such, future studies could examine bystanders' involvement over time in greater detail to uncover these processes.

In an era where the extent of women's victimization is just starting to emerge—highlighted by movements like #MeToo and scandals such as The Voice of Holland—the inclusion of gender and gendered violence in research has become increasingly relevant. With an increased recognition of such forms of violence as a collective responsibility, there has also been increasing attention to the potential of bystanders in the prevention and intervention of these acts. A plethora of intervention programs focusing on (sexually) transgressive behavior and violence has emerged in the United States, with similar initiatives recently developing in the Netherlands. Despite the extensive body of research on bystander intervention in gendered violence, this has particularly focused on sexual violence and IPV, with less focus on, for example, sexual harassment or (sexually) transgressive behavior. As such, it is important for future research to examine bystander behavior in these forms of violence, in particular because these behaviors – with harassment often occurring in public spaces – comprise a regular occurrence for many women – and such everyday experiences substantially influence women's feelings of safety (e.g., Condon et al., 2007; Roberts et al., 2022; Stanko, 1990). For example, what do bystanders actually do in these situations? How often do they intervene, and what situational aspects influence this? Do victims perceive intervention as effective, and if so, under what conditions?

Despite certain limitations, CCTV footage can be used to uncover what bystanders actually do on the spot, including gendered forms of violence that have traditionally been studied using vignette or survey designs. While certain forms of violence are less likely to be captured on camera, it is possible to rely on CCTV footage to examine bystander behavior in, for example, sexual harassment. In a recent pilot study, based on observations in night clubs in Amsterdam, we identified a relatively high prevalence of incidents, with bystanders intervening in approximately half of the cases, suggesting that bystanders can – and do – play an important role in terminating such incidents (Van Baak et al., 2022). As observing these incidents on the spot also proved to be challenging, relying on CCTV footage in bars or festivals may be particularly useful to systematically analyze how bystanders act during

such situations. In addition to the focus on bystanders, CCTV footage can be used to examine other components. For example, where exactly does sexual harassment occur within a location? How do situational aspects like lighting and the presence of security guards influence the development of these incidents? What are the patterns of behavior of the perpetrators?

Further, the case files were only comprised of heterosexual relationships, resulting in an inability to consider bystander behavior in LGBTQ+ relationships due to its absence in the collected data. In addition, perceived intimate ties were in the CCTV footage only found between bystanders presenting as men and women. As mentioned in Chapter 1, IPV in LGBTQ+ relationships has not received the same research attention and legitimacy compared to heterosexual relationships, which have traditionally been the focus of IPV research. This is also reflected within the body of literature on bystander behavior in IPV, which has overwhelmingly focused on heterosexual relationships (though for exceptions, see Graham et al., 2023; Kirk-Provencher et al., 2023; Pagliaro et al., 2021). While this dissertation was unfortunately not able to consider bystander behavior across diverse relationships, it is important for future research to do so. This is particularly important given the high rates of IPV within LGBTQ+ communities and the additional barriers that individuals may experience in disclosing IPV (Edwards et al., 2015; Sylaska & Edwards, 2014), making it crucial to examine how bystanders can facilitate intervention in IPV among LGBTQ+ individuals.

Finally, this dissertation focused on gender as a social category without considering other important social categories, such as race/ethnicity, class, and age, or their intersections. Yet, the experience of violence, navigation through public space, and fear of crime can differ substantially across groups (e.g., Day, 1999). Previous research suggests that social group membership also plays an important role in intervention behavior, with, for example, bystanders being more likely to intervene on behalf of in-group members (Levine et al., 2002; Levine et al., 2005). In addition to gender, future research should integrate other social categories to provide a more detailed understanding of bystander behavior across contexts.

Concluding remarks

Working on this dissertation over the past four years has been an incredibly enriching experience that has opened up new disciplines to me. Coming from a background in criminology and law, immersing myself in an interdisciplinary area of research that incorporates insights from sociology, social psychology, and gender studies, has been

very insightful, and occasionally challenging. Not only has gender been approached from a wide variety of disciplines, but there are probably also few topics that are as polarized and politicized as gender, and debates around gender seem to have become increasingly heated in the current political landscape. The use of a relatively novel and non-traditional research method (i.e., video analysis) has introduced its own set of challenges. Although the methods used in this dissertation have their limitations, and many questions remain unanswered, I nevertheless believe that it is necessary to include topics that can be controversial and difficult to study. Incorporating novel and non-traditional research methods – such as video analysis – in doing so is important if we want to further our understanding of human behavior, resulting in the ability to shed light on issues in new ways that may both complement and challenge existing research relying on more traditional methods.

Indeed, the last few years have shown that gender has become increasingly relevant in research, policy and practice. For example, since the Istanbul convention came into effect in the Netherlands in 2016 – highlighting the historically unequal power relations between men and women and the disproportionate victimization of women in domestic violence cases – the government has been required to implement a gender-sensitive approach to addressing domestic violence. Further, there has been political and public advocacy for the adoption of the term *femicide* to more explicitly denote the intentional murder of women and girls, which has recently been incorporated by the Public Prosecution Service. As of 2024, the Dutch Sexual Offenses Act has been implemented, offering victims of sexual violence and sexually transgressive behavior more protection, making coercion no longer a necessary requirement for a conviction of rape or sexual assault, and criminalizing sexual harassment in public. These efforts underscore the importance of future research on bystanders in gender-based violence, including the role that bystanders can play in preventing, terminating or de-escalating these forms of violence, and relying on innovative approaches in doing so is necessary to move the field forward.

Sixty years after the tragic murder of Kitty Genovese, it is evident that the narrative surrounding bystander intervention requires substantial revision. The results of this dissertation demonstrate that individuals do intervene – both in public and private settings – and have a variety of actions available to them. It is imperative to start viewing bystanders as inherently active, so that we can shift our focus to initiatives that build upon their current efforts, by acknowledging their essential role and by providing them with practical tools and support systems. As victims of aggression are likely to receive help, regardless of their gender presentation, it is crucial to change the narrative of public unsafety and to empower individuals to feel more comfortable

in public space. In doing so, it is also important to increasingly recognize and value more "invisible" forms of bystander intervention and to acknowledge women for their contributions to public and private safety. While there are some gender differences in terms of bystander behavior, it is important to acknowledge that this is context-specific and more nuanced than previous research relying on other data sources has indicated. Further, it is essential to "mainstream" research on gender-based violence by integrating this body of literature into the broader field of violence – in the context of bystander behavior as well as beyond – to ensure that this form of violence is not treated as an isolated issue. In doing so, it is important to draw on real-life data to enhance our scientific understanding of bystander behavior in naturally occurring violent situations.

By reframing the narrative around bystander behavior, acknowledging the nuanced nature of gendered intervention, mainstreaming violence against women in the broader context of violence, and utilizing real-life data in research on bystander behavior, we can – hopefully – not only move the scientific field forward, but also contribute to safe spaces for everyone, in public and in "private." Although we cannot undo the tragic case of Kitty Genovese and its lasting impact on research and public perceptions, we can transform the narrative – of "the girl that no one cared" about, as Bill Genovese has described the myth surrounding his sister – into one that is more positive and accurate, and it is my hope that this dissertation has served as a small step towards achieving these goals.

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Dutch summary (Nederlandse samenvatting)

Dit proefschrift richt zich op de rol van gender in het gedrag van omstanders bij geweld in de publieke en private ruimte. Hierbij kijk ik enerzijds naar het gedrag van omstanders tijdens conflicten die plaatsvinden in de openbare ruimte, waarvoor ik gebruik maak van CCTV-beelden van de Gemeente Amsterdam. Daarnaast onderzoek ik het gedrag van omstanders bij partnergeweld, dat zich vaak “thuis” afspeelt, aan de hand van dossiers van meldingen die bij Veilig Thuis (het meldpunt voor huiselijk geweld) zijn gedaan.

Aan de hand van zowel kwalitatief als kwantatief onderzoek, wordt dit nader onderzocht in vier verschillende hoofdstukken. In Hoofdstuk 2 onderzoek ik welke acties omstanders verrichten tijdens conflicten in de openbare ruimte – niet alleen hoe omstanders ingrijpen, maar ook wat zij doen als zij *niet* ingrijpen. Daarnaast onderzoek ik in dit hoofdstuk in hoeverre mannen en vrouwen verschillen of overeenkomen in deze verschillende acties. In Hoofdstuk 3 onderzoek ik in hoeverre interventie door omstanders samenhangt met de gender compositie van de conflictpartijen. Met andere woorden: is interventie door omstanders waarschijnlijker in conflicten tussen mannen of tussen mannen en vrouwen? Ook onderzoek ik hierbij de rol van intimiteit: maakt het verschil of het conflict plaatsvindt tussen individuen die – op basis van observaties – een intieme band lijken te hebben? Vervolgens kijk ik in Hoofdstuk 4 naar de redenen van omstanders om melding te doen van partnergeweld bij Veilig Thuis, waarbij ik zowel omstanders' gender als gender compositie van de partners meeneem. Tot slot kijk ik in Hoofdstuk 5 naar de redenen van omstanders om *anoniem* melding te doen bij Veilig Thuis als specifieke vorm van interventie.

De resultaten van het onderzoek laten zien dat omstandergedrag tijdens gewelddadige situaties in zowel de publieke als private ruimte ontzettend divers is. Er zijn enkele nuances in het gedrag van mannen en vrouwen als omstanders – overeenkomend met genderverwachtingen die omstanders actief vormgeven – zowel in *hoe* omstanders ingrijpen als *waar* zij dit doen. Tegelijkertijd zijn deze verschillen kleiner dan verwacht op basis van eerdere literatuur en blijkt dat omstanders vaak ingrijpen, ongeacht de gender compositie van de individuen die in conflict zijn. Om omstandergedrag beter te begrijpen, is het belangrijk om verder te kijken dan alleen fysieke interventie, diverse vormen van interventie mee te nemen, en om omstandergedrag in verschillende contexten te onderzoeken.



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About the author

Carlijn van Baak was born on September 9th, 1992, in Tilburg, the Netherlands. She received her master's degrees in Criminal Justice & Criminology from Sam Houston State University (SHSU) in Huntsville, Texas and in Criminal Law from Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU). After working for some years, including as a legal advisor at the courthouse, she started as a PhD candidate at the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement (NSCR) and the University of Amsterdam, Department of Sociology in 2020. As of August 2024, Carlijn works as a postdoc researcher at the NSCR. Her current research interests center on domestic violence, child maltreatment, bystanders, and gender.



List of publications

Mahon, J.E., **Van Baak, C.**, & Hayes, B.E. (under review). Reproductive coercion among women in Côte D'Ivoire. *Violence Against Women*.

Van Baak, C., & Eichelsheim, V. (forthcoming). Children exposed to intimate partner violence: Responses, coping and consequences. *Journal of Family Violence*.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Ethogram Chapter 2

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE	
Code	Description
Bystander's gender	<p>Comprised of the observer's perception of bystander's gender presentation, based on visual appearance, including aspects such as clothing, hairstyle, movements, and posturing. We observe how bystanders present themselves in public space, which may vary from how people experience and self-identify in terms of gender (Miller, 2002; West & Zimmerman, 1987).</p> <p>Coded as a dichotomous variable, where 1=woman, 0=man. Note that we initially left open the possibility to code individuals as 'other', but this code was not assigned throughout the coding, resulting a dichotomous measure of 'man' or 'woman'.</p>
DEPENDENT VARIABLES	
Code	Description
Affiliative intervention	<p>The bystander engages in affiliative intervention if they display calming/open hand gestures, nonforceful touching and practical help.</p> <p>Calming hand gestures can be recognized by slow, calming gestures performed with open hands, usually with the palm of the hand facing the ground or directed towards the receiver (Ejbye-Ernst et al., 2020). If the bystander is calmly sending the conflict party away, by pointing his finger or hand away from the conflict, this should also be coded as a calming gesture. The calming hand gesture must always be directed towards one of the conflict parties.</p> <p>Non-forceful touching may include stroking, gently or affectionately touching. The code should not be assigned if the bystander is physically holding the person back or if the bystander is inadvertently bumping into the victim or touching them while handing over an item. The non-forceful touching may occur on different parts of the body, but is typically directed towards the individual's arm, hand, chest, shoulder or back. Examples include hugging, patting someone's back, holding someone's hand or rubbing someone's arm. It may also include wrapping an arm around someone's shoulder, as long as it does not involve any force and is not meant to hold the individual back or to change his/her direction.</p> <p>Practical help may consist of providing medical help, offering a handkerchief, or picking up an object belonging to the conflict party. In addition, the bystander may help or assist the individual in getting up if they are on the ground.</p>
Non-physical aggressive intervention	<p>The bystander displays a fast, expressive and aggressive hand movement, typically pointing at someone in a threatening manner (Ejbye-Ernst et al., 2020; Liebst et al., 2019). Typically, the hand palms are turned upwards, and may simulate hitting or slapping, or may include movements inviting the other party to come closer. The gesture must be directed towards one of the conflict parties, and not towards objects or other bystanders. The gestures do generally not involve physical contact, but it may include brief non-forceful physical contact, such as tapping the conflict party on the chest with a finger (Ejbye-Ernst et al., 2020).</p>

Physical
nonaggressive
intervention

The bystander engages in physical non-aggressive intervention if they block contact between conflict parties, hold a person back, haul a person off, or push conflict parties apart.

Blocking contact occurs when the bystander blocks the individual(s) from reaching a conflict party. This is typically expressed by the bystander moving directly between the conflict parties, meaning the bystander is forming a barrier between them. The arms/hands may be used for blocking, but no physical force directed towards the conflict parties should be included. While the bystander may be standing in between both conflict parties not facing any of them in particular (as pictured below), the bystander may also be standing in front of one of the conflict parties focusing on one individual instead. The blocking may occur with or without touching the individual. If there is touching involved, this generally involves the bystander placing his or her hands on the individual's chest, shoulders or arms. Note that there should not be any physical force involved and that the bystander is typically standing still.

Holding back occurs when a bystander holds a person back from moving further towards the conflict or conflict partner (Liebst et al., 2019). The bystander may grab the individual from the front or from behind and wrap her/his arms around him. This is, however, not required. This code also includes less prominent actions of holding someone back, such as pulling back/holding the individual's arm to prevent the individual from moving towards the other conflict party or firmly keeping a hand on the individual's shoulder.

Hauling a person off occurs when the bystander holds a person and pulls/carries that individual away from the conflict or conflict partner (Liebst et al., 2019). The bystander is actively trying to change the course, position or direction of the receiver by doing so (Ejbye-Ernst et al., 2020). The bystander may do so by wrapping his or her arms around the person's waist, chest or shoulders and pulling him/her away (as pictured below). Additionally, 'hauling off' may be performed in more subtle ways, such as grabbing the individual by the shoulder and changing his or her course.

Pushing conflict parties apart occurs when the bystander pushes a person away from the conflict or conflict partner in a non-aggressive manner (Liebst et al., 2019). This is typically done in order to create or increase distance between the conflict parties. This may be done by applying one or both hands on the individual's chest, shoulders, arms or back (as pictured below). While 'pushing apart' always includes physical contact, the push should not include a lot of physical force.

Physical
aggressive
intervention

The bystander engages in physical aggressive intervention if they throw, shove, hit or kick a conflict party or use violence against a conflict party on the ground.

Throwing occurs when the bystander firmly grips a person and then throws that person in an aggressive manner (Liebst et al., 2019). Shoving occurs when the bystander shoves a person in a forceful and aggressive manner, typically in a hit-like manner (Liebst et al., 2019). This may be done by applying one or both hands on the individual's chest, shoulders, arms or back, which are then used to aggressively create distance by using physical force. This can typically be derived from expressive and imposing movements (e.g. stretching the arms all the way out). Hitting occurs when the bystander hits one of the conflict parties with open or closed hand (Liebst et al., 2019). Kicking occurs when the bystander kicks one of the conflict parties with his/her knee or leg (Liebst et al., 2019). Violence against a person on the ground occurs when the bystander physically attacks a person on the ground (Liebst et al., 2019). This may consist of the bystander kicking, hitting or pushing a person who is sitting or lying on the ground.

Attentive action	<p>The bystander engages in attentive action if they stop moving or slow down to watch the conflict, attentively move closer to the conflict or remain in close proximity to the one of the conflict parties.</p> <p>The bystander stops moving or is slowing down his or her pace while moving, in order to watch (one of) the conflict parties. This can be seen from the bystander's facial expression, the position or angle of the face or body towards the conflict, and (the pace of) his/her bodily movements. It must be clear that they are watching the conflict parties as a result of the conflict (which indicates a degree of involvement). The bystander should be standing (or sitting) still for at least 2 seconds or slow his pace for at least 2 seconds, while simultaneously watching the conflict.</p> <p>If the bystander is already standing still when the conflict starts (or when they become visible), this code should also be assigned if the bystander remains standing still while watching the conflict. Note that it is not required that the bystander is standing or walking; the code must also be assigned when the bystander is sitting down (e.g. on a bench or on the floor) while watching the conflict. This is included because the bystander refrains from walking away (which would typically indicate less involvement).</p> <p>The bystander is moving, either by walking or cycling, in the direction of – and getting closer to – the conflict parties. The bystander must be aware and is watching the conflict parties when moving towards the conflict. This movement should occur for at least 2 seconds. If the bystander is moving in the direction of the conflict, but appears to do so for a reason unrelated to the conflict (i.e. walking or cycling in the direction the bystander was headed in the first place), this code should not be assigned. While we cannot identify the bystanders' intentions, you must have the feeling the bystander is moving towards the conflict to get a closer look (which indicates a degree of involvement). Moving on the legs while remaining in the same place does not count. In addition, movements less than 2 seconds should not be included. The code should be assigned at the beginning of the movement.</p> <p>Close proximity occurs when the bystander moves close to one of the conflict parties and gives them full attention for at least 10 seconds (Philpot et al., 2019). Typically, the bystander will be standing in close proximity to him or her, within a distance of 2 meters. It is not required that the bystander remains standing still in one spot; they may also move around a bit, as long as the bystander remains in close proximity and remains focused on the individual. The bystander may be talking to the individual while showing full attention, but this is not required. While we do not know the intentions of the bystander, the action must appear to occur with the purpose of calming, consolidating or checking on the individual. If the bystander is standing close and showing attention, but does not appear to do so in a calming matter, this code should not be assigned. If the bystander is engaging in any of the intervention actions (e.g. calming gestures), they might be standing in close proximity for a longer duration. However, this should not be coded as 'close proximity', because this is already incorporated in the intervention codes.</p>
Inattentive action	<p>The bystander is moving (e.g. walking or cycling) and is watching or glancing at (one of) the conflict parties while doing so. This can be seen from the bystander's facial expression or the position or angle of the face or body towards the conflict. The bystander does not stop moving and it not slowing down to watch the conflict or to get involved, but is instead continuing his/her way (which would typically indicate less involvement compared to those who slow down or stop moving).</p>

Reactive action	<p>The bystander engages in provocative action if they laugh as a response to the conflict, film the conflict parties or cheer the conflict parties on.</p> <p>The bystander laughs during or after witnessing the conflict as a response to what happens during the conflict. The laughing must occur during or directly or shortly after watching the conflict, and is typically directed to other bystanders or to no one in particular. Note that the code 'laughing' does not require to be open-mouthed, but may also include more subtle forms, such as smiling. If the bystander is laughing, but this does not appear to be related to the conflict, this code should not be assigned.</p> <p>The bystander is filming or taking photos of the conflict or conflict parties with a cell phone or another device.</p> <p>The bystander is cheering on (one of) the conflict parties by clapping in their hands or by cheering for them with his/her hands in a fist while watching the conflict. Typically, this action is directed towards the conflict parties.</p>
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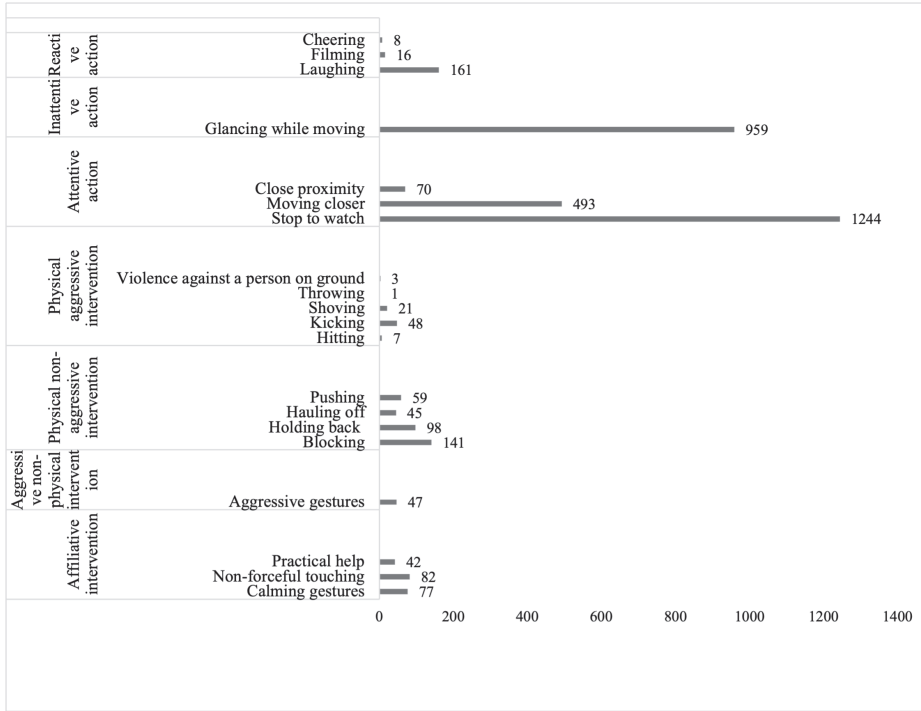
CONTROL VARIABLES

Code	Description
Duration of conflict	The duration of the conflict in seconds. This can be derived from the start time and end time of the conflict. Any pauses of the conflict that may occur in between do not have to be excluded from the total duration. Coded as a continuous variable in Excel.
Severity of conflict	<p>The severity of the conflict. Coded as a nominal variable, where 1 = low severity, 2 = medium severity, 3 = high severity. These levels are retrieved from Lindegaard et al. (2022).</p> <p>Level 1: non-violent aggressive actions that penetrate the opponent's intimate space. These actions include: aggressive gesturing, pointing at a person, feinting (pretending to be about to hit a person), obscene gesturing, poking or prodding a person's body/head with finger/hand, or an aggressive push without hit-like nature. The action must be aggressive (i.e. fast expressive gestures, intimidating, provocative or reactive gestures, forward body/head leaning movement), must be targeted towards the conflict party, and must be in the intimate space of the conflict party, as such becoming intrusive. Typically, this is within half an arm's length away.</p> <p>Level 2: physically aggressive actions towards a person, consisting of isolated hits, slaps, punches, kicks, shoves, head-butts, scratches and similar actions. This may also include low level weapon use, meaning that the conflict party uses an object that is unlikely to severely hurt the opponent (e.g. handbag, shoe). Additionally, it includes grappling, headlocks, aggressive holding, flurries of hits, slaps, punches and kicks.</p> <p>Level 3: physically aggressive actions to a person on their knees or lying on the ground, while the person doing this is standing. This includes kicks, stomps, and punches to a person on the ground. This also includes high level weapon use, meaning that the conflict party uses an object that is likely to severely hurt the opponent (e.g. knife, glass bottle). Additionally, it includes choking the opponent. If the person who is committing any of these actions is also on the ground, this should not be included.</p> <p>In a conflict, several actions with ranging categories of severity may co-exist. In that case, the severity should be based on the action in the highest category. For example, if the conflict parties engage in all three levels, the severity of the conflict should be coded as 3 = high severity. Coded in Excel.</p>

Total numbers of bystanders	The count of the total number of bystanders present during the conflict. This number only includes bystanders (i.e. those who are aware of the situation and are included in the study), and excludes individuals who appear to be unaware of the conflict. Conflict parties are additionally excluded in this count. Coded as a continuous variable in Excel.
Number of intervening bystanders	<p>The count of the number of intervening bystanders in a conflict. A bystander is counted as an intervening bystander if they engage in one of the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affiliative intervention <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Calming/open hand gestures – Non-forceful touching – Practical help • Non-physical aggressive intervention <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Aggressive gestures • Physical non-aggressive intervention <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Blocking contact between conflict parties – Holding a person back – Hauling a person off – Pushing conflict parties apart • Physical aggressive intervention <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Hitting – Kicking – Throwing – Shoving – Violence against a person on the ground – Weapon use <p>For bystanders who do not engage in any intervention actions, this number consists of all intervening bystander during the conflict. If a bystander does engage in an intervention action, this count excludes the specific bystander him- or herself. For example, if there are in total 5 intervening bystanders in a conflict, the count becomes “5” for all bystanders who intervene, but “4” for who bystanders who do intervene.</p>
Composition of bystanders	The gender composition of the group of bystanders present during a conflict. Coded as a dichotomous variable, consisting of ‘mixed-gender’ (i.e., group of bystanders comprised of both men and women) and ‘men-only’ (i.e., group of bystanders comprised of men only). Note that there were no situations in which the group of bystanders was comprised of women only.
Gender of first intervener	The gender presentation of the first individual to intervene in a conflict, consisting of ‘man’, ‘woman’, or ‘none’ if intervention was absent.

Appendix B

Overview of bystander actions



Note. The frequencies of the 20 specific actions (e.g., practical help) do not correspond with the frequencies of the overarching categories of actions (e.g., affiliative intervention) described in Table 1. When bystanders engaged in multiple actions within the same category (e.g., practical help *and* non-forceful touching), this meant that that bystanders engaged in affiliative intervention, which was thus coded as one overarching action. As such, the frequencies of specific actions *exceed* the total number of categories displayed in Table 1.

Appendix C

Ethogram Chapter 3

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	
Code	Description
Gender of conflict parties	<p>Based on the observer's perception of how conflict parties present themselves in public space in terms of visual gender cues, including their clothing, hairstyle, movements, and posturing.</p> <p>Coded as a binary variable, where 0=conflict between a man and a woman, 1=conflict between men. Note that we initially created a code for "other" for gender presentation, but this code was not observed during the coding.</p>
Bystander's gender	<p>Comprised of the observer's perception of bystander's gender presentation, based on visual appearance, including aspects such as clothing, hairstyle, movements, and posturing. We observe how bystanders display gender presentation, which may vary from how people experience and self-identify in terms of gender (Miller, 2002; West & Zimmerman, 1987).</p> <p>Coded as a dichotomous variable, where 1=woman, 0=man. Note that we initially left open the possibility to code individuals as 'other', but this code was not assigned throughout the coding, resulting a dichotomous measure of 'man' or 'woman'.</p>
Conflict between perceived intimate ties	<p>Based on the observed display of non-verbal tie signs in the videos (Goffman, 1971; Morris, 1977). This includes public displays of affection that typically occur more often between those maintaining intimate ties compared to those without, such as kissing, placing an arm around the waist or shoulder, and leaning bodies against one another (Afifi & Johnson, 1999). Further, it may include proxemics: They typically maintain closer physical distances than people in other kinds of relationships, while, in conflict, they tend to decrease touching, increase physical distance, and may leave the scene (Andersen et al., 2006; Ivy & Gleason, 2022; Guerrero, 2013; Sluzki, 2016). Note that this code is inclusive of all forms of pre-existing romantic or sexual ties, which may vary from casual and short-term encounters to potentially committed and long-term relationships. For each conflict – across all gender compositions – we code whether the conflict parties were perceived as intimate ties.</p> <p>Coded as a binary variable, where 0=conflict without perceived intimate ties, 1=conflict between perceived intimate ties.</p>

DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Code	Description
Bystander intervention (individual)	<p>Bystander intervention occurs when the individual bystander terminates or tries to terminate the conflict by engaging in at least one of the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calming/open-hand gestures towards (one of) conflict parties; Calming hand gestures can be recognized by slow, calming gestures performed with open hands, usually with the palm of the hand facing the ground or directed towards the receiver (Ejbye-Ernst et al., 2020). If the bystander is calmly sending the conflict party away, by pointing his finger or hand away from the conflict, this should also be coded as a calming gesture. The calming hand gesture must always be directed towards one of the conflict parties. • Non-forceful touching of (one of) conflict parties; The bystander touches one of the conflict parties in a non-forceful manner (Liebst et al., 2019). This may include stroking, gently or affectionately touching. The non-forceful touching may occur on different parts of the body, but is typically directed towards the individual's arm, hand, chest, shoulder or back. Examples include hugging, patting someone's back, holding someone's hand or rubbing someone's arm. • Blocking contact between conflict parties; The bystander blocks the individual(s) from reaching a conflict party. This is typically expressed by the bystander moving directly between the conflict parties, meaning the bystander is forming a barrier between them. The arms/hands may be used for blocking, but no physical force directed towards the conflict parties should be included. While the bystander may be standing in between both conflict parties not facing any of them in particular (as pictured below), the bystander may also be standing in front of one of the conflict parties focusing on one individual instead. • Holding (one of) conflict parties back; The bystander holds a person back from moving further towards the conflict or conflict partner (Liebst et al., 2019). The bystander may grab the individual from the front or from behind and wrap her/his arms around him. This is, however, not required. This also includes less prominent actions of holding someone back, such as pulling back/holding the individual's arm to prevent the individual from moving towards the other conflict party or firmly keeping a hand on the individual's shoulder. • Hauling off (one of) conflict parties; The bystander holds a person and pulls/carries that individual away from the conflict or conflict partner (Liebst et al., 2019). The bystander is actively trying to change the course, position or direction of the receiver by doing so (Ejbye-Ernst et al., 2020). The bystander may do so by wrapping his or her arms around the person's waist, chest or shoulders and pulling him/her away. Additionally, 'hauling off' may be performed in more subtle ways, such as grabbing the individual by the shoulder and changing his or her course. • Pushing the conflict parties apart; The bystander pushes a person away from the conflict or conflict partner in a non-aggressive manner (Liebst et al., 2019). This is typically done in order to create or increase distance between the conflict parties. This may be done by applying one or both hands on the individual's chest, shoulders, arms or back. • Practical help to (one of) conflict parties; The bystander provides some kind of practical help directed to one of the conflict parties during the conflict. This could, for example, consist of providing medical help, offering a handkerchief, or picking up an object belonging to the conflict party. In addition, the bystander may help or assist the individual in getting up if he/she is on the ground. • Aggressive gestures towards (one of) conflict parties; The bystander displays a fast, expressive and aggressive hand movement, typically pointing at someone in a threatening manner (Ejbye-Ernst et al., 2020; Liebst et al., 2019). Typically, the hand palms are turned upwards, and may simulate hitting or slapping, or may include movements inviting the other party to come closer. The gesture must be directed towards one of the conflict parties, and not towards objects or other bystanders.

- **Throwing (one of) conflict parties;** The bystander firmly grips a person and then throws that person in an aggressive manner (Liebst et al., 2019).
 - **Shoving (one of) conflict parties;** The bystander shoves a person in a forceful and aggressive manner. Note that this is typically performed in a hit-like manner (Liebst et al., 2019). This may be done by applying one or both hands on the individual's chest, shoulders, arms or back, which are then used to aggressively create distance by using physical force. This can typically be derived from expressive and imposing movements (e.g. stretching the arms all the way out).
 - **Hitting (one of) conflict parties;** The bystander hits one of the conflict parties with open or closed hand (Liebst et al., 2019).
 - **Kicking (one of) conflict parties;** The bystander kicks one of the conflict parties with his/her knee or leg (Liebst et al., 2019).
 - **Violence against (one of) conflict parties on the ground;** The bystander physically attacks a person on the ground (Liebst et al., 2019). This may consist of the bystander kicking, hitting or pushing a person who is sitting or lying on the ground.
- For each bystander, this is coded as a binary variable, where 0=individual does not intervene, 1=individual intervenes in conflict.

Bystander intervention (situational)	<p>Bystander occurs when at least one of the bystanders terminates or tries to terminate the conflict by engaging in at least one of the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calming/open-hand gestures towards (one of) conflict parties; • Non-forceful touching of (one of) conflict parties; • Blocking contact between conflict parties; • Holding (one of) conflict parties back; • Hauling off (one of) conflict parties; • Pushing the conflict parties apart; • Practical help to (one of) conflict parties; • Aggressive gestures towards (one of) conflict parties; • Throwing (one of) conflict parties; • Shoving (one of) conflict parties; • Hitting (one of) conflict parties; • Kicking (one of) conflict parties; <p>Violence against (one of) conflict parties on the ground.</p> <p>For each conflict, this is coded as a binary variable, where 0=no intervention in conflict, 1=intervention in conflict. In contrast to the previous code, this is not coded per bystander but per conflict (i.e., at the aggregated level).</p>
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CONTROL VARIABLES

Code	Description
Duration of conflict	The duration of the conflict in seconds. This can be derived from the start time and end time of the conflict. Any pauses of the conflict that may occur in between do not have to be excluded from the total duration. Coded as a continuous variable.
Severity of conflict	<p>The severity of the conflict. Coded as a nominal variable, where 1 = low severity, 2 = medium severity, 3 = high severity. These levels are retrieved from Lindegaard et al. (under review).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level 1: non-violent aggressive actions that penetrate the opponent's intimate space. These actions include: aggressive gesturing, pointing at a person, feinting (pretending to be about to hit a person), obscene gesturing, poking or prodding a person's body/head with finger/hand, or an aggressive push without hit-like nature. The action must be aggressive (i.e. fast expressive gestures, intimidating, provocative or reactive gestures, forward body/head leaning movement), must be targeted towards the conflict party, and must be in the intimate space of the conflict party, as such becoming intrusive. Typically, this is within half an arm's length away. • Level 2: physically aggressive actions towards a person, consisting of isolated hits, slaps, punches, kicks, shoves, head-butts, scratches and similar actions. This may also include low level weapon use, meaning that the conflict party uses an object that is unlikely to severely hurt the opponent (e.g. handbag, shoe). Additionally, it includes grappling, headlocks, aggressive holding, flurries of hits, slaps, punches and kicks. • Level 3: physically aggressive actions to a person on their knees or lying on the ground, while the person doing this is standing. This includes kicks, stomps, and punches to a person on the ground. This also includes high level weapon use, meaning that the conflict party uses an object that is likely to severely hurt the opponent (e.g. knife, glass bottle). Additionally, it includes choking the opponent. If the person who is committing any of these actions is also on the ground, this should not be included. <p>In a conflict, several actions with ranging categories of severity may co-exist. In that case, the severity should be based on the action in the highest category. For example, if the conflict parties engage in all three levels, the severity of the conflict should be coded as 3 = high severity.</p> <p>Coded as a categorical variable, recoded into dummy variables.</p>
Total numbers of bystanders	The count of the total number of bystanders present during the conflict. This number only includes bystanders (i.e. those who are aware of the situation and are included in the study), and excludes individuals who appear to be unaware of the conflict. Conflict parties are additionally excluded in this count. Coded as a continuous variable.

Appendix D

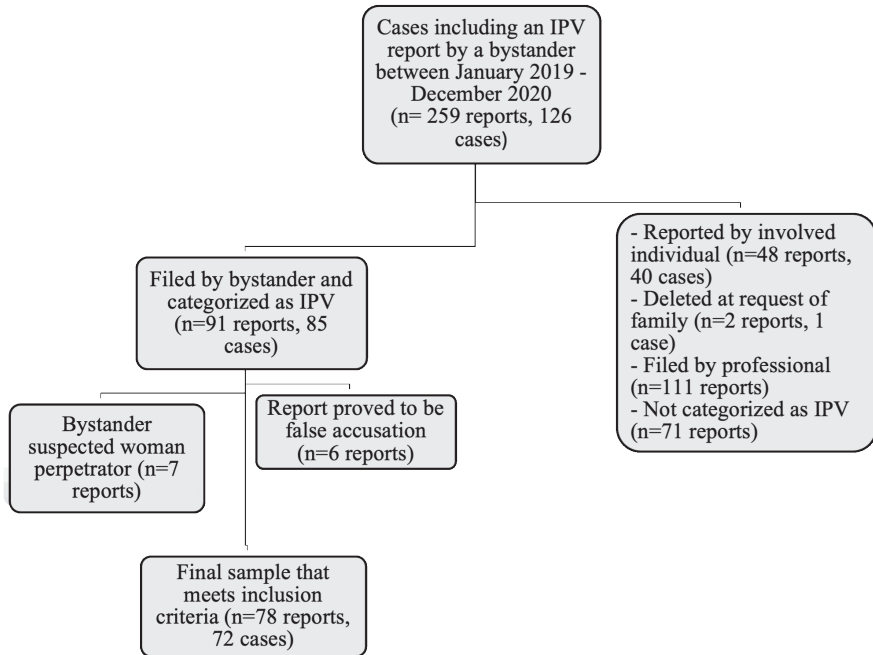
Overview of inter-coder reliability results

Type	Krippendorff's α	Code	Krippendorff's α
Gender			1.00
Intimate conflicts			.74
Bystander intervention	1.00	Calming/open hand gesture	.66
		Non-forceful touching	.72
		Practical help	N/A*
		Aggressive gesture	.43
		Blocking contact	.87
		Holding back	1.00
		Hauling off	.75
		Pushing apart	.71
		Hitting	.66
		Kicking	N/A*
		Shoving	.66
		Throwing	1.00
		Violence against person on the ground	1.00

* These actions were not observed within the sample for inter-coder reliability (none of the two coders coded these actions). As such, we were unable to calculate the inter-coder reliability score for these actions.

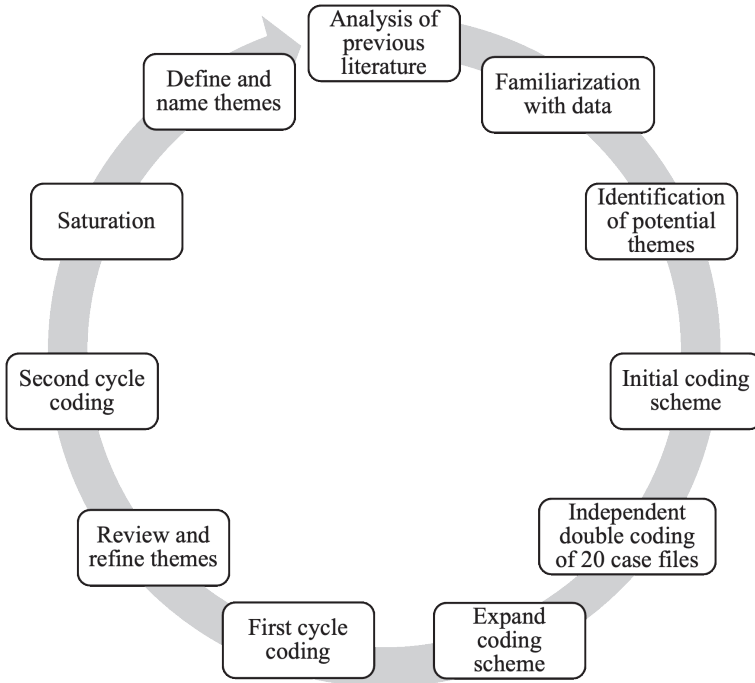
Appendix E

Sample selection



Appendix F

Overview of qualitative process



Appendix G

Overview of reports (N=78)

	Intimate terrorism		Situational couple Violence		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Women bystanders	28	35.9	22	28.2	50	64.1
Neighbor	14	17.9	13	16.7	27	34.6
Family	10	12.8	7	9.0	17	21.8
Social network	4	5.1	1	1.3	5	6.4
Unknown	0	0.0	1	1.3	1	1.3
Men bystanders	12	15.4	8	10.3	20	25.6
Neighbor	6	7.7	5	6.4	12	15.4
Family	4	5.1	1	1.3	5	6.4
Social network	2	2.6	2	2.6	4	5.1
Unknown	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Men and women bystanders	3	3.8	1	1.3	4	5.1
Neighbor	0	0.0	1	0.0	1	1.3
Family	3	3.8	0	0.0	3	3.8
Social network	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Unknown	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Gender missing	1	1.3	3	3.8	4	5.1
Neighbor	0	0.0	2	2.6	2	2.6
Family	1	1.3	0	0.0	1	1.3
Social network	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Unknown	0	0.0	1	1.3	1	1.3
Total	44	56.4	34	43.6	78	100.0

