

Abstract

Image-based sexual abuse (IBSA) encompasses the taking, sharing, and/or making threats to share nude or sexual images of others without consent. Many individuals witness or become aware of someone perpetrating IBSA, but most bystanders do not intervene. There is currently little understanding of why bystanders are apathetic, and this article aims to address this gap by identifying individual and contextual facilitators and barriers of willingness to intervene in these contexts. Three correlational studies were conducted, measuring a series of individual and contextual variables and willingness to intervene in cases involving the taking of images without consent (Study 1; $n = 134$), sharing images without consent (Study 2; $n = 133$); and threatening to share images (Study 3; $n = 132$). Purposeful selection regression model building was used to analyse the data. The final model in Study 1 explained 57.3% of variance, with five unique predictors of willingness to intervene: being female, greater feelings of responsibility, greater confidence to intervene, more positive social norms towards intervention, and greater empathic concern. In Study 2, the final model explained 65.6% of variance, with three unique predictors: greater feelings of responsibility, more positive social norms towards intervention, and less IBSA victimisation experiences. Lastly, the final model in Study 3 explained 57.8% of variance, with three unique predictors: greater feelings of responsibility, greater confidence to intervene, and more positive social norms towards intervention. These findings have important implications for agendas which aim to encourage bystander intervention in IBSA contexts and ultimately prevent and minimise harm to victims.

Key words: bystander intervention; image-based sexual abuse; image-based abuse; revenge pornography; upskirting; social justice ally

Individual and Contextual Facilitators and Barriers of Bystander Intervention Intent in Image-Based Sexual Abuse Contexts

Image-based sexual abuse (IBSA) encompasses the taking or creating, sharing, and/or making threats to share nude or sexual images of others without consent (McGlynn et al., 2019; Powell et al., 2018). Research with respondents aged 16-64 from the UK, Australia, and New Zealand ($n = 6109$) found that 37.7% had ever been a victim of IBSA, with having images taken without consent (33.2%) being the most common, followed by having images shared without consent (20.9%), and receiving threats to share images (18.7%) (Henry et al., 2020). More recent research with over 10,000 respondents across 10 countries found similar prevalence rates, ranging from 13.6% to 29.8% for any form of IBSA victimisation (Umbach et al., 2025). In terms of perpetration, Henry and colleagues (2020) found that 17.5% had ever perpetrated a form of IBSA, with the most likely being taking an image without consent (15.8%). There is also greater prevalence of sexual self-image behaviours, IBSA victimisation, and perpetration among young adults (i.e., up to the age of 39) compared to those aged 40 and above (Henry et al., 2019, 2020).

IBSA has been conceptualised as being part of the continuum of sexual violence (SV). Particularly, its sexualised nature, use to facilitate SV, victim impacts and harm minimisation (Henry & Powell, 2015; McGlynn et al., 2017), despite victims experiencing harms to both physical and mental health (Bates, 2017; Powell et al., 2018; Umbach et al., 2025). For example, victims report diagnoses of PTSD, depression, and anxiety, use of negative coping mechanisms such as excessive drinking, as well as losses to self-esteem, confidence, trust in others, and feelings of safety and control (Bates, 2017; Campbell et al., 2020; Champion et al., 2022; McGlynn et al., 2019; Umbach et al., 2025). Victims also report secondary victimisation, such as being blamed by others, or allocated some responsibility for their victimisation (Campbell et al., 2020; Gassó et al., 2021).

Given the prevalence of IBSA and its impact on victims, identifying ways to prevent this behaviour and minimise the harm to victims is an important endeavour. Preventative measures often focus on the use of education and criminal justice responses; however, both measures have come under scrutiny for their inappropriate handling of victim experiences and the perpetuation of victim blaming attitudes (e.g., Bond & Tyrrell, 2021; Gavey et al., 2023; Huber, 2023). An additional avenue for prevention and minimisation of harm is bystander intervention, with bystanders in this context being individuals who witness or become aware of someone perpetrating IBSA.

There is great potential for bystanders to successfully prevent and minimise the harm arising from IBSA. First, evidence has demonstrated that social support for victims of IBSA is extremely important (Bates, 2017; Office of eSafety Commissioner, 2017), and research with bystanders who have experience of intervening in these situations considered such behaviours helpful (Flynn et al., 2022b, 2025). Further, research has found that 64.1% of people have ever witnessed, or become aware of, someone perpetrating IBSA (Flynn et al., 2022a, 2025). Similar to victimisation and perpetration rates, being a bystander to IBSA is much more likely among younger adults (i.e., those below the age of 40; anonymised for review, personal communication, February 8, 2021). However, despite a high proportion of individuals being bystanders to IBSA, less than half (45.6%) reported saying or doing something in response (Flynn et al., 2022a, 2025).

The potential for bystander intervention to be a successful preventative measure relies on bystanders having the confidence and ability to intervene in these situations. Therefore, it is important to understand what may facilitate or inhibit intervention in the cases. The Bystander Intervention Model is one of the most influential models in explaining bystander intervention behaviour, specifying a five-step process (Latané & Darley, 1970) whereby bystanders must 1) notice the incident, 2) interpret that incident or behaviour as problematic,

3) feel responsible to do something, 4) determine that they have the confidence or skills required to intervene, and 5) form an intention to intervene. The Bystander Action Coils Model (Banyard, 2015; Banyard, Moschella, et al., 2021) provides a more holistic explanation for bystander intervention behaviour. As an ecological model, originally put forward by Bronfenbrenner (1977) and expanded upon by Banyard (2011, 2015), it looks beyond internal cognitive processes by acknowledging the importance of characteristics of the situation, the wider context, and the importance of past experiences impacting on future intentions for intervention, alongside cognitive and decision-making processes. Both models have been supported in SV contexts (e.g., Banyard, Moschella, et al., 2021; Burn, 2009) and there is preliminary evidence that these models are relevant to IBSA contexts.

To date, much of the research investigating facilitators and barriers of bystander intervention has been within the context of physical SV, demonstrating a range of individual, situational, and contextual characteristics which can impact bystander intervention (Mainwaring et al., 2022). Individual characteristics are those related to the bystander, and include demographic characteristics, attitudes, experiences, and cognitions. Specifically, bystanders who feel a greater sense of responsibility, have more confidence to intervene, hold fewer rape myth attitudes, and have fewer fears of punitive actions from intervention are more likely to intervene (Mainwaring et al., 2022). Female bystanders are also more likely to intervene, but this often depends on the type of intervention behaviour (Mainwaring et al., 2022). This may be due to greater self-awareness of SV and sense of vulnerability among females in these contexts (Burn, 2009). Initial work looking at the role of individual characteristics for bystander behaviour in IBSA contexts has identified that, greater feelings of empathy and responsibility and condemnation of IBSA behaviour can facilitate intentions to intervene (Banyard, Edwards, et al., 2021; Flynn et al., 2022a, 2022b; Henry et al., 2020). Regarding gender, evidence is mixed, with some research suggesting females are more likely

to intervene than males (Banyard, Edwards, et al., 2021; Henry et al., 2020) and other research suggesting males are more likely to intervene than females (Flynn et al., 2025).

Situational characteristics are those related to the incident, with evidence suggesting intervention is more likely when the bystander is friends with the victim, the victim is female, and the behaviour is more severe (Katz, 2015; Mainwaring et al., 2022; Savage et al., 2017). In IBSA contexts, ambiguity of the situation and fears of social and safety repercussions, including a lack of support from peers, are associated with reduced intentions to intervene (Banyard, Edwards, et al., 2021; Flynn et al., 2022a, 2022b, 2025; Henry et al., 2020; Mainwaring et al., 2024a). More recent experimental research looking at situational facilitators and barriers identified that relationships with the victim and perpetrator, and whether the image was self-taken or stealth-taken, are important determinants of bystander willingness to intervene, such that having personal relationships with the victim or perpetrator can facilitate intentions to intervene, and consensually created images (i.e., selfies) can act as a barrier for intervention when those images are shared (Mainwaring et al., 2025).

Finally, contextual characteristics are those related to the characteristics of the wider contextual environment in which the bystander exists, such as cultures and communities, peer norms, and broader belief systems. Research has found that positive social norms towards intervention, as well as positive or supportive responses from organisations in the handling of SV, and trust in that organisation to handle incidents appropriately, are associated with an increased likelihood of intervention (Mainwaring et al., 2022). In IBSA contexts, trust in the handling of these matters within the criminal justice system (CJS) is likely to be a key contextual factor of consideration for bystanders when determining a course of action, and whether they engage with the police. Research has shown a significant lack of confidence, training, and understanding among police forces in the UK for crimes of this nature (Bond &

Tyrrell, 2021), with bystanders also acknowledging their reluctance to report these crimes to the police (Flynn et al., 2022b). In IBSA contexts, positive social norms towards intervention and prevention, and perceptions of positive justice outcomes, can facilitate intentions to intervene (Banyard, Edwards, et al., 2021; Flynn et al., 2022b; Mainwaring et al., 2024a).

Recent work has begun to consolidate knowledge in this area. For example, a recent scoping review synthesising 17 studies on bystander intervention in IBSA contexts highlights both the growing interest in this topic and the fragmentation of the evidence base, including inconsistencies in terminology, methodological diversity, and gaps in demographic representation (Kromann & Flynn, 2025). Importantly, the review identifies that while bystanders often recognise IBSA as problematic, intervention is inconsistent and frequently inhibited by social and situational barriers such as fear of repercussions and uncertainty about how to respond (Kromann & Flynn, 2025). These findings reinforce the need for research that systematically examines the relative contribution of individual and contextual predictors of bystander intervention intentions. Overall, while research on bystander intervention in IBSA contexts is growing, the evidence base remains limited and heterogeneous. Specifically, there is a lack of research that systematically examines the relative contribution of multiple individual and contextual predictors within a single model, and across different forms of IBSA behaviour. Addressing this gap is important for informing targeted intervention strategies and prevention efforts.

The Current Research

The current research examines bystander intervention across three distinct forms of IBSA: non-consensual taking, non-consensual sharing, and threats to share images. In line with conceptualisations of IBSA as part of the broader continuum of SV (McGlynn et al., 2017), these behaviours represent conceptually distinct points along the continuum of IBSA, differing in terms of perceived severity, ambiguity, social norms, and potential consequences

for victims. As such, the psychological processes underpinning bystander decision-making may vary across these contexts.

Rather than treating IBSA as a single, homogeneous construct, the current research adopts a differentiated approach to examine whether the same individual and contextual characteristics operate consistently across these behaviours. This approach is supported by emerging evidence that situational and relational factors influence bystander responses differently depending on the form of IBSA (Mainwaring et al., 2024a, 2025).

Three separate studies with independent samples were conducted to avoid carryover effects and demand characteristics that may arise when participants are exposed to multiple IBSA scenarios within a single study. This approach enhances internal validity by ensuring that responses to each behaviour are not influenced by prior exposure to other scenarios, while reducing participant burden in line with ethical guidance (Oates et al., 2021).

Importantly, combining these studies within a single article enables direct comparison of findings across IBSA behaviours using a consistent methodological framework. This facilitates identification of both generalisable predictors of bystander intervention and behaviour-specific differences, providing a more comprehensive and theoretically informative account than would be achieved through a single-study approach.

The current research addresses the following research question: To what extent do individual and contextual characteristics predict bystander willingness to intervene in response to non-consensual taking (Study 1), non-consensual sharing (Study 2); and making threats to share (Study 3)?

Method

Participants

All participants were recruited from the general population using Prolific (<https://www.prolific.com/>). Prolific is an online participant recruitment platform which

connects researchers to a large pool of potential participants who have signed up to take part in research studies for monetary incentives (Cowen, 2017). To be eligible, participants had to reside in the UK and be between 18 and 39 years of age. The sample was restricted to cisgender participants due to the likely insufficient power to compare other gender groups, as evidenced in past research of a similar nature (Flynn et al., 2022a, 2025). The population of interest was restricted to individuals in the UK given the cross-country variation in the handling of IBSA within the CJS (see Haynes, 2018), and socio-political variations that would likely impact bystander attitudes and behaviour (Pozzoli et al., 2012). Further, there has been a concerted effort to curb SV and harmful online behaviours within the UK over the last few years, demonstrated by several legal changes and new initiatives. For example, Transport for London introduced a campaign to help tackle sexual harassment on public transport, including displaying posters on public transport to help users recognise and intervene safely when witnessing harassment (*TfL Launches Powerful Campaigns to Encourage People to Be Active Bystanders*, n.d.; Transport for London, 2021). Further, in 2023 the Online Safety Act was introduced to help protect children and adults online, with the sharing of images without consent becoming a ‘priority offence’, acknowledging this crime as a serious online offence (*Crackdown on Intimate Image Abuse as Government Strengthens Online Safety Laws*, n.d.; Online Safety Act, 2023). These changes and initiatives evidence the importance of continued research efforts in this area, particularly the role of bystanders with a UK population.

Regarding age, this range was selected because research suggests they are most impacted by IBSA, in terms of victimisation, perpetration, and bystander experiences (Henry et al., 2019, 2020; anonymised for review, personal communication, February 8, 2021). Finally, most participants indicated that they had not ever taken part in a bystander intervention programme (Study 1 94.0%, Study 2 94.7%, Study 3 93.9%), and there were no

notable differences in the demographic characteristics of the three samples (demographic information is provided in Table A1 of Appendix A).

All sample sizes met predetermined requirements for suitable power of .8¹. The sample for Study 1 comprised 134 participants, with a relatively even gender split (52.2% female, 47.8% male). Most of the sample was White (79.9%), and heterosexual (82.8%), with an average age of 29.69 years ($SD = 6.12$). The sample for Study 2 comprised 133 participants, with an equal gender split (50.4% female, 49.6% male). Most of the sample were White (76.7%) and heterosexual (80.5%), with an average age of 29.70 years ($SD = 5.69$). Finally, the sample for Study 3 comprised 132 participants, with a relatively even gender split (52.3% female, 47.7% male). Again, most of the sample were White (80.3%) and heterosexual (79.5%), with an average age of 28.67 years ($SD = 5.82$).

Design

The three studies used the same correlational, regression model-building design, whereby participants were asked to consider their general responses and attitudes towards someone taking a nude or sexual image of another person without their knowledge and/or permission (Study 1); someone sharing a nude or sexual image of another person without their permission (Study 2); and someone threatening to share a nude or sexual image of another person (Study 3).

Measures and Materials

Participants in all three studies were presented with participant and data privacy information, an informed consent form, a demographic questionnaire, and debrief information. They also completed a series of measures relating to their likelihood of intervention, their gender (individual), and the following 12 individual and contextual variables of interest, all of which were chosen after consideration of key theoretical frameworks in this domain, namely the Bystander Intervention Model (Latané & Darley,

1970) and ecological model of bystander intervention in SV contexts (Banyard, 2011, 2015):

1) perception of the behaviour as problematic (individual); 2) feelings of responsibility (individual); 3) confidence to intervene (individual); 4) social norms towards intervention (contextual); 5) social norms towards perpetration (contextual); 6) perceived frequency of IBSA (contextual); 7) trust and confidence in the police and CJS (contextual); 8) endorsement of IBSA myths (individual); 9) own image-taking and sharing behaviours (individual); 10) IBSA victimisation (individual); 11) IBSA perpetration (individual); and 12) general empathy (individual). Most measures were developed or adapted for this research after consideration of key literature in this area (items developed and adapted for Studies 1, 2 and 3, including reliability coefficients, are provided in Table B1 of Appendix B).

Likelihood of Intervention. Participants rated the likelihood that they would intervene in response to observing or becoming aware of each of the following forms of IBSA via 10 items: someone taking a nude or sexual image of another person without their knowledge and/or permission (Study 1), sharing a nude or sexual image of another person without their permission (Study 2), and threatening to share a nude or sexual image of another person (Study 3). The 10 items were developed and informed by previous research (e.g., Flynn et al., 2022a, 2022b, 2025; Mainwaring et al., 2023) and participants rated their likelihood of engaging in these behaviours using a 7-point Likert scale (1 ‘extremely unlikely’ to 7 ‘extremely likely’). PCA identified a single factor structure with eight items for use in the regression analyses, each with a good level of reliability (Study 1 $\alpha = .84$, Study 2 $\alpha = .90$, Study 3 $\alpha = .84$). The two remaining items were excluded because they formed a second factor which represented bystander blame and minimisation but had poor reliability across two of the three studies. An average score for likelihood of bystander intervention was created with higher scores representing greater likelihood of intervention.

Perception of Behaviour as Problematic. Participants rated how problematic they considered the behaviour to be via two items using a 7-point Likert scale (1 ‘strongly disagree’ to 7 ‘strongly agree’). PCA identified a single factor structure for these items, each with acceptable reliability (Study 1 $r = -.53$, $p < .001$, Study 2 $r = -.49$, $p < .001$, Study 3 $r = -.23$, $p = .009$). An average score for perception of behaviour as problematic was created with higher scores representing greater perception of behaviour being problematic.

Feelings of Responsibility. Participants rated how responsible they would feel to address the behaviour via nine items using a 7-point Likert scale (1 ‘strongly disagree’ to 7 ‘strongly agree’). PCA identified a single factor structure for these items, each with good or excellent reliability (Study 1 $\alpha = .86$, Study 2 $\alpha = .90$, Study 3 $\alpha = .88$). An average score for feelings of responsibility was created with higher scores representing greater feelings of responsibility to intervene.

Confidence to Intervene. Participants rated how confident they would be in addressing the behaviour via four items using a 7-point Likert scale (1 ‘strongly disagree’ to 7 ‘strongly agree’). PCA identified a single factor structure for these items, each with good reliability (Study 1 $\alpha = .82$, Study 2 $\alpha = .85$, Study 3 $\alpha = .86$). An average score for confidence to intervene was created with higher scores representing greater confidence to intervene.

Social Norms Towards Intervention. Participants rated how supportive they think their friends would be if they responded to the behaviour in the ways outlined in the *likelihood of intervention* measure via eight items using a 7-point Likert scale (1 ‘extremely unsupportive’ to 7 ‘extremely supportive’). Although there were 10 original items, eight were used within the analyses to be consistent with those identified through PCA for the likelihood of intervention. Each factor had good reliability (Study 1 $\alpha = .86$, Study 2 $\alpha = .89$, Study 3 $\alpha = .88$). An average score for social norms towards intervention was created for use within the

main analyses with higher scores representing greater likelihood of friends support for intervention.

Social Norms Towards Perpetration. Participants rated the likelihood that their friends would perpetrate similar behaviours via three items in Study 1, and six items in Studies 2 and 3, using a 7-point Likert scale (1 ‘extremely unlikely’ to 7 ‘extremely likely’). PCA identified a single factor structure for these items, each with good or excellent reliability (Study 1 $\alpha = .85$, Study 2 $\alpha = .92$, Study 3 $\alpha = .93$). An average score for social norms towards perpetration was created with higher scores representing greater likelihood of friends’ engagement in taking nude or sexual images of others without knowledge and/or permission (Study 1), in sharing nude or sexual images of others without permission (Study 2), and in threatening to share nude or sexual images of others (Study 3).

Perceived Frequency of IBSA Perpetration. Participants rated how frequently they believe people perpetrate the non-consensual taking of images via three items in Study 1, how frequently they believe people perpetrate the non-consensual sharing of images via six items in Study 2, and how frequently they believe people threaten to share images via six items in Study 3. Participants rated perceived frequency using a 5-point Likert scale (1 ‘never’ to 5 ‘a great deal’). PCA identified a single factor structure for these items, each with good or excellent reliability (Study 1 $\alpha = .90$, Study 2 $\alpha = .92$, Study 3 $\alpha = .88$). An average score for frequency of IBSA was created with higher scores representing greater perceived frequency of people taking nude or sexual images of others without knowledge and/or permission (Study 1), sharing nude or sexual images of others without permission (Study 2), and threatening to share nude or sexual images of others (Study 3).

Trust and Confidence in the Police and CJS. Participants rated their perceptions of how the police and the CJS would respond to this behaviour using eight items using a 7-point Likert scale (1 ‘strongly disagree’ to 7 ‘strongly agree’). PCA identified a single factor

structure for these items, each with good or excellent reliability (Study 1 $\alpha = .92$, Study 2 $\alpha = .91$, Study 3 $\alpha = .88$). An average score for trust and confidence in the police and CJS was created with higher scores representing greater trust and confidence.

Endorsement of IBSA Myths. Participants rated their endorsement of IBSA myths via 16 items. These items were modified from the Sexual Image-Based Abuse Myth Acceptance (SIAMA) scale (Powell et al., 2019). In modifying this scale, items were revised to be gender-neutral and additional items were added to reflect a wider range of IBSA behaviours and subtle blaming attitudes akin to those of rape myths (e.g., Payne et al., 1999). Participants rated their agreement with these statements using a 7-point Likert scale (1 ‘strongly disagree’ to 7 ‘strongly agree’). PCA identified a three-factor structure. Factor 1 included five items which reflected the minimisation of IBSA, each with acceptable or good reliability (Study 1 $\alpha = .88$, Study 2 $\alpha = .68$, Study 3 $\alpha = .84$). Factor 2 included four items which reflected victim blame, each with acceptable or good reliability (Study 1 $\alpha = .81$, Study 2 $\alpha = .79$, Study 3 $\alpha = .74$). Factor 3 included two items which reflected attitudes towards IBSA as a form of SV, each with acceptable reliability (Study 1 $r = .88, p < .001$, Study 2 $r = .83, p < .001$, Study 3 $r = .63, p < .001$). Average scores for the endorsement of IBSA myths were created with higher scores representing greater minimisation of IBSA (minimisation), victim blame (blame), and belief that IBSA is not a form of SV (IBSA not SV).

Own Image-Taking and Sharing Behaviour. Participants rated the frequency with which they engaged in the taking and sharing of nude or sexual images via four items using a 5-point Likert scale (1 ‘never’ to 5 ‘a great deal’). These items were adapted from those within the sexual self-image behaviours measure developed by Powell et al. (2019). PCA identified a single factor structure for these items. An average score measuring own image-taking and sharing behaviours was created with higher scores representing greater frequency of image-taking and sharing behaviours.

IBSA Victimisation. Participants rated the frequency of their own experiences of IBSA victimisation via three items using a 5-point Likert scale (1 ‘never’ to 5 ‘a great deal’). These items were adapted from those within the IBSA victimisation measure developed by Powell et al. (2019). PCA identified a single factor structure for these items. An average score measuring IBSA victimisation was created with higher scores representing greater IBSA victimisation.

IBSA Perpetration. Participants rated the frequency of their own engagement in IBSA perpetration using three items using a 5-point Likert scale (1 ‘never’ to 5 ‘a great deal’). These items were adapted from those within the IBSA perpetration measure developed by Powell et al. (2019). PCA identified a single factor structure for these items. An average score measuring IBSA perpetration was created with higher scores representing greater IBSA perpetration.

General Empathy. Participants rated their general feelings of empathy towards others via 14 items from the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) (Davis, 1980) using a 5-point Likert scale (1 ‘does not describe me’ to 5 ‘describes me very well’). The perspective-taking and the empathic concern subscales were used, each comprising seven items. Reliability was acceptable for the perspective-taking subscale (Study 1 $\alpha = .77$, Study 2 $\alpha = .75$, Study 3 $\alpha = .74$) and the empathic concern subscale (Study 1 $\alpha = .82$, Study 2 $\alpha = .81$, Study 3 $\alpha = .75$). Average scores measuring perspective-taking and empathic concern were created with higher scores representing greater perspective-taking and empathic concern.

Procedure

All participants completed the study online via Qualtrics XM (<https://www.qualtrics.com/>). First, participants were presented with participant and data privacy information and provided informed consent. They were then asked to provide demographic information which also included screener validation to ensure that the

participants resided in the UK and were between 18 and 39 years of age. Participants were then randomly allocated one of the three studies and asked about their general responses and attitudes towards someone taking a nude or sexual image of another person without their knowledge and/or permission (Study 1), someone sharing a nude or sexual image of another person without their knowledge and/or permission (Study 2), or someone making threats to share a nude or sexual image (Study 3). There were two attention check questions, and those who did not pass these questions were excluded from the final sample. After completing the survey, participants were thanked for their participation and provided with debrief information.

All studies received ethical approval from the University's Research Ethics Committee and were preregistered on AsPredicted, a website which allows researchers to pre-register their studies. The preregistration can be viewed via the following link:

<https://aspredicted.org/zycn-n3yc.pdf> (Wharton Credibility Lab, 2015).

Analysis

A purposeful selection model building process was used in all three studies to create parsimonious regression models to predict the likelihood of bystander intervention in the context of non-consensual taking (Study 1), non-consensual sharing (Study 2) and making threats to share (Study 3). The steps outlined in Hosmer et al. (2013), with appropriate adaptations made for use with linear regression, were followed. After carrying out PCA on all of the measures, a total of 16 individual and contextual characteristics were considered for the model building process including: 1) gender, 2) perception of behaviour as problematic, 3) feelings of responsibility, 4) confidence to intervene, 5) social norms towards intervention, 6) social norms towards perpetration, 7) perceived frequency of IBSA perpetration, 8) trust and confidence in the police and CJS, 9) minimisation, 10) blame, 11) IBSA not SV, 12) own image-taking and sharing behaviours, 13) IBSA victimisation, 14) IBSA perpetration, 15)

perspective-taking, and 16) empathic concern. Importantly, the number of individual and contextual characteristics of interest increased from 13 to 16 because PCA identified a three-factor structure for endorsement of IBSA myths (minimisation, blame and IBSA not SV), and a two-factor structure for general empathy (perspective-taking and empathic concern).

In building the regression models, the following steps were followed: 1) univariate non-parametric correlations were performed to determine which individual and contextual characteristics (predictor variables) should be included in the initial regression model. A significance threshold of $p < .25$ was used as the convention of $p < .05$ can lead to the exclusion of potentially important predictor variables (Hosmer et al., 2013); 2) all predictors identified in Step 1 were included in an initial regression model; 3) any variables that did not significantly contribute (at $p < .05$) were removed one by one, starting with the variable which had the highest p value. When variables were removed, the smaller model was compared to the larger model to ensure there was no detrimental impact of the removal of this variable upon the model whereby coefficients of smaller models were compared to those of the larger model to ensure no problematic changes in magnitude ($> 20\%$) as a result of the removal of a variable; 4) predictor variables originally excluded at Step 1 were added one by one to see if they significantly contributed to the model when considered alongside other variables, to create a main effects model; and 5) the models adequacy and fit was assessed (Hosmer et al., 2013).

Results

Regression analyses were performed to examine which of 16 predictor variables predict bystander willingness to intervene in response to the taking nude or sexual images of another person without their knowledge and/or permission (Study 1), the sharing nude or sexual images of another person without their knowledge and/or permission (Study 2), and to threats to share a nude or sexual image (Study 3).

In Studies 1 and 3, the assumptions of multicollinearity (see correlation matrices in Tables C1 and C3 in Appendix C), normality, linearity, independence of residuals, and homoscedasticity were met and there were no extreme outliers for the outcome variables. However, there was evidence of some multivariate and extreme univariate outliers for some of the predictor variables. Data screening showed outliers were not caused by missing data or data input errors. In Study 2, the assumptions of multicollinearity (see correlation matrix in Table C2 in Appendix C), normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity were met. The Durbin-Watson test showed that the independence of residuals assumption was violated. However, the value (1.43) was only just outside the acceptable range (1.44-2.03) and therefore was not of great concern. Consistent with Studies 1 and 3, there were no extreme outliers for the outcome variable, but there was evidence of some multivariate and extreme univariate outliers for some of the predictor variables. Again, data screening showed outliers were not caused by missing data or data input errors.

To protect against the influence of outliers, non-parametric univariate analyses were conducted when determining which predictor variables to enter into the initial model across all three studies. The final model was also tested with the extreme outliers removed and in all instances: 1) the final model was significant, 2) all variables significantly contributed to the model, and 3) the sign of the coefficients were the same.

Study 1: Non-Consensual Taking

In Study 1, univariate non-parametric correlations identified 12 predictor variables for inclusion in the initial regression model using the $p < .25$ threshold (see Table 1 for univariate correlations).

[Table 1 about here]

The initial linear regression model with 12 predictors was statistically significant, $F(12, 121) = 15.37, p < .001$, and explained 60.4% (adjusted $R^2 = 56.4\%$) of variance in the

likelihood of bystander intervention. Seven predictors were removed from the model (Steps 2 and 3), and no predictor variables originally excluded at Step 1 were found to contribute to the development of a parsimonious final model (Step 4). Therefore, the final model included five predictors and was statistically significant, $F(5, 128) = 36.73, p < .001$. This model explained 58.9% (adjusted $R^2 = 57.3\%$) of variance in the likelihood of engaging in bystander intervention. Summaries of the initial and final model are presented in Table 2.

[Table 2 about here]

The final model shows that confidence to intervene made the biggest contribution ($\beta .27$), followed by social norms towards intervention ($\beta .26$), feelings of responsibility ($\beta .22$), gender ($\beta .20$), and empathic concern ($\beta .16$). Four of the five predictors were individual characteristics of interest, whereby greater feelings of confidence, greater feelings of responsibility, being female, and greater empathic concern predicted greater likelihood of bystander intervention. The fifth predictor was contextual in nature, with more supportive social norms towards intervention predicting a greater likelihood of bystander intervention.

Study 2: Non-Consensual Sharing

Univariate non-parametric correlations identified 14 predictor variables for inclusion in the initial regression model using the $p < .25$ threshold² (see Table 1 for univariate correlations).

The initial linear regression model with 14 predictors was statistically significant, $F(14, 118) = 17.64, p < .001$, and explained 67.7% (adjusted $R^2 = 63.8\%$) of variance in the likelihood of bystander intervention. Twelve predictors were removed from the model (Steps 2 and 3) and IBSA victimisation became a significant predictor (Step 4). Therefore, the final model included three predictors and was statistically significant, $F(3, 129) = 84.88, p < .001$. This model explained 66.4% (adjusted $R^2 = 65.6\%$) of variance in the likelihood of engaging in bystander intervention. Summaries of the initial and final model are presented in Table 3.

[Table 3 about here]

The final model shows that feelings of responsibility made the biggest contribution (β .65), followed by social norms towards intervention (β .34) and IBSA victimisation (β -.13). Two of the three predictors were individual characteristics of interest, whereby greater feelings of responsibility, and fewer IBSA victimisation experiences predicted a greater likelihood of bystander intervention. The third predictor was contextual in nature, with more supportive social norms towards intervention predicting a greater likelihood of bystander intervention.

Study 3: Making Threats to Share

Regarding the statistical analysis, univariate non-parametric correlations identified 12 predictor variables for inclusion in the initial regression model using the $p < .25$ threshold (see Table 1 for univariate correlations).

The initial linear regression model with 12 predictors was statistically significant, $F(12, 119) = 15.79, p < .001$, and explained 61.4% (adjusted $R^2 = 57.5\%$) of variance in the likelihood of engaging in bystander intervention. Nine predictors were removed from the final model (Steps 2 and 3), and no predictor variables originally excluded at Step 1 were found to contribute to the development of a parsimonious final model (Steps 4 and 5). Therefore, the final model included three predictors and was statistically significant, $F(3, 128) = 60.76, p < .001$. This model explained 58.7% (adjusted $R^2 = 57.8\%$) of variance in the likelihood of engaging in bystander intervention. Summaries of the initial and final model are presented in Table 4.

[Table 4 about here]

The final model shows that feelings of responsibility makes the biggest contribution (β .53), followed by social norms towards intervention (β .21), and confidence to intervene (β .18). Two of the three predictors were individual characteristics of interest, whereby greater

feelings of responsibility and greater confidence to intervene predicted a greater likelihood of bystander intervention. The third predictor was contextual in nature, with more supportive social norms towards intervention predicting a greater likelihood of bystander intervention.

Discussion

This article reported on three survey studies which investigated the relationship between a range of individual and contextual variables and willingness to intervene to address the following research questions: To what extent do individual and contextual characteristics predict bystander willingness to intervene in response to non-consensual taking (Study 1), non-consensual sharing (Study 2); and making threats to share (Study 3)? Collectively, the studies demonstrate the importance of a range of individual and contextual characteristics in predicting bystander intervention in IBSA contexts, with all three final models incorporating both individual and contextual predictors and explaining over 50% of the variance.

The importance of feelings of responsibility and social norms towards intervention for bystander intervention in IBSA contexts was demonstrated across all three studies, which aligns with past research in both SV and IBSA contexts. Namely, feeling a greater sense of responsibility has been identified as a facilitator in both SV (Mainwaring et al., 2022) and IBSA contexts (Flynn et al., 2022a, 2022b; Mainwaring et al., 2024a). The systematic review by Mainwaring and colleagues (2022) also identified positive social norms towards intervention as a key facilitator of intervention in SV contexts, and recent research in IBSA contexts has shown that group dynamics, particularly in regard to concerns about social sanctions, can inhibit bystander intervention in these contexts (Flynn et al., 2022b; Harder, 2020). The current research further exemplifies the importance of perceived peer attitudes in influencing bystander behaviours in IBSA contexts, whilst also demonstrating the alignment between bystander behaviour in IBSA and SV contexts, lending further support to the idea of

IBSA within the continuum of SV and the practical benefits of this conceptualisation for policy and practice (see McGlynn et al., 2017 and further discussion below).

In addition, confidence to intervene was identified as important for Studies 1 and 3; gender and empathic concern were identified as important for Study 1; and IBSA victimisation was identified as important for Study 2. Although not previously investigated or reported upon within an IBSA context, greater feelings of confidence have been shown to be important in SV contexts (Mainwaring et al., 2022). The current research adds to this knowledge base concerning the importance of feeling confident in oneself to engage in intervention in this related, but underexplored, context. Notably, confidence to intervene was not a significant predictor in the final model in Study 2, however, it was positively correlated with willingness to intervene. In this case, it may be that bystander confidence plays less of a role for incidents of non-consensual sharing, as the available options for intervention seem more straightforward or achievable for them compared to those for incidents of non-consensual taking or making threats to share images. For example, it may be considered easier to confront someone sharing an image than it would be to confront someone in the act of taking an intimate image. Equally, participants are more likely to have had experience of being a bystander to non-consensual sharing (Flynn et al., 2022a, 2025), so again, this more normalised experience may explain why confidence to intervene was less relevant in this context. These theories should be tested in future research.

Regarding the gender of the bystander and empathic concern within Study 1, these findings are consistent with evidence to suggest that women are more willing to intervene when witnessing this behaviour (Harder, 2020; Henry et al., 2020), and that empathy is related to confidence to intervene in SV contexts (Fido et al., 2019; Kotze & Turner, 2021). This is the first study that has further developed our understanding of the facilitative nature of

general empathy, being the first to identify its importance for bystander intervention in the context of non-consensual taking of images.

Although both gender and empathic concern were significant predictors for Study 1, these variables did not significantly contribute to the final models for Studies 2 or 3. Such differences may have emerged due to the differential nature of the behaviours. Namely, with incidents of non-consensual taking, there would likely be an identifiable victim present during the incident; however, with non-consensual sharing and making threats to share, the victim would not necessarily be present at the time of the incident. In relation to cyberbullying, Barlińska and colleagues (2018) found that only cognitive empathy (i.e., perspective taking), and not affective empathy (i.e., empathic concern), was predictive of bystander intervention. They suggested the lack of immediate emotional signals from the victim for the bystander to witness explained this non-significant finding. Such an explanation may also apply here, with a lack of emotional response on display for the bystander to notice, thereby reducing the importance of empathy in bystander behaviour.

Regarding gender, these findings suggest it does not play a significant a role in understanding behaviour for non-consensual sharing and making threats to share images. Bystander gender may have been a significant predictor in the final model for Study 1 because the taking of images without consent can include behaviours such as upskirting and downblousing, behaviours usually associated with female victims. Therefore, female bystanders may be more willing to intervene in this case compared to non-consensual sharing or making threats to share which may not share the same gendered behavioural stereotypes. Further, a recent systematic review identified that in SV contexts, the relationship between bystander gender and intervention often depends on the type of intervention behaviour being considered (Mainwaring et al., 2022). The current findings suggest that not all facilitators and barriers will apply in all IBSA contexts.

Regarding IBSA victimisation, our findings contribute to the mixed findings regarding whether these experiences facilitate or inhibit bystander intervention in SV contexts (Mainwaring et al., 2022). In IBSA contexts, the impact of previous victimisation upon bystander intervention has not been directly investigated, but inferences made from existing evidence suggest that it is either unrelated or acts as a barrier (Flynn et al., 2022a; Henry et al., 2020). Research has found that respondents who experienced more IBSA victimisation are more likely to minimise the harms of IBSA and express attitudes of victim blaming (Flynn et al., 2023), which may explain why these experiences can lead to a reduced willingness to intervene, in line with the current findings. Equally, it is possible that the inhibitive nature of previous victimisation is due to experiences with bystanders, or that their own experiences have created a sense of normalisation, and therefore they no longer consider the behaviour to be serious enough to warrant intervention. It would be important for future research to investigate why such experiences can inhibit bystander intervention.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

There are some important theoretical and practical implications of this work. First, partial support was demonstrated for the Bystander Intervention Model (Latané & Darley, 1970). Specifically, greater feelings of responsibility and confidence to intervene were found to facilitate bystander intervention intent, showing support for step 3 and 4 of the model. Regarding perceptions of the behaviour as problematic (i.e., step 2), this variable did not significantly contribute to the final regression models. The Bystander Intervention Model specifies a linear process, whereby bystanders pass through each stage consecutively. Therefore, this model predicts that perceiving the behaviour as problematic should lead the bystander to then consider whether they feel responsible to intervene. This may explain why this variable did not remain a significant predictor, because the variance has been explained by feelings of responsibility (step 3) and confidence to intervene (step 4). However, this

finding also suggests that feelings of responsibility and confidence to intervene explain unique variance in bystander intervention, and therefore a simple linear journey through these stages may not be the most appropriate explanation of bystander behaviour and the decision-making process.

Second, the variety of predictors within the final regression models across all three studies lends support to the use of a more holistic model in explaining bystander behaviour in IBSA contexts, such as the Bystander Action Coils Model (Banyard, 2015; Banyard, Moschella, et al., 2021). Specifically, the regression models identified unique contributions of facilitators and barriers at both the individual and contextual levels, suggesting that the explanation of bystander behaviour, and efforts to decrease apathetic responding among bystanders in IBSA contexts, requires a holistic approach.

Regarding practical implications, when developing bystander intervention programmes, it is advised to focus on a continuum of behaviour rather than a single type of behaviour (Banyard, 2015). Whilst programmes targeted specifically for bystander intervention in IBSA contexts could be developed, implications would be best targeted towards revising existing programmes, or for the development of new programmes, to address bystander intervention within IBSA contexts alongside other forms of SV. In support of conceptualising IBSA as part of the continuum of SV, the current research has identified a range of facilitators and barriers of intervention in IBSA contexts and demonstrated many commonalities across IBSA and SV contexts. It is important, therefore, for intervention programmes to adopt a more holistic approach and target a multitude of facilitators and barriers within programmes to ensure the greatest likelihood of success (Brown et al., 2014). In practice, this means ensuring programmes address facilitators and barriers related to the bystander themselves, such as increasing feelings of responsibility and confidence, the wider context, by addressing social norms that influence behaviours, and the situation itself, such as

addressing biases inherent in decision making when faced with incidents of IBSA whereby the person depicted in the image initially consented to the image being taken (as demonstrated in Mainwaring et al., 2025). Equally, a holistic approach means ensuring enough hypothetical scenarios, with varying characteristics, are considered and discussed within these programmes, both in terms of varying IBSA behaviours, and variations within each type of IBSA behaviour. For a fully holistic approach, it is important to draw upon research which has looked at the role of situational facilitators and barriers when developing these programmes (see Mainwaring et al., 2025 for further discussion).

Many programmes aimed at bystander intervention in SV contexts, such as Green Dot and Bringing in the Bystander, aim to develop competencies to overcome barriers of intervention, increase feelings of responsibility, gain confidence to intervene, increase feelings of empathy, and emphasise the importance of peers and the community in prevention (Coker et al., 2011; Mujal et al., 2021). Programmes which incorporate techniques to address these aspects have demonstrated some success (e.g., Kettrey & Marx, 2020; Mujal et al., 2021). The current research has demonstrated supporting evidence for the role of these facilitators and barriers in IBSA contexts. Therefore, focusing on feelings of responsibility, confidence, empathy, and social norms within these education programmes for IBSA contexts could have comparable benefits. Given the facilitative role of supportive social norms towards intervention, bystander intervention programmes should work towards targeting peer groups. Engaging with groups rather than individuals provides an opportunity to explore peer attitudes, and relevant educational materials which target these attitudes can facilitate positive peer-group changes. Further, literature to date has shown that interventions which target misperceptions of social norms and allow individuals to discuss social norms can have positive impacts on bystander intervention behaviour (e.g., Orchowski, 2019; Orchowski et al., 2018).

Limitations and Future Directions

It is important to acknowledge that the current research is limited in terms of the sample, causality, and focus on behavioural intent. First, the sample was limited in size, all participants were cisgender, and most participants were heterosexual and of White ethnicity, thereby limiting the generalisability of the findings. The limited sample size meant that the research was underpowered with regard to detecting potential interaction effects within the regression models. Therefore, future research should investigate whether such interaction effects exist, and whether they contribute to the development of a parsimonious model, with both statistical and practical benefits. In particular, given the gendered nature of the literature (e.g., Henry et al., 2020; McGlynn et al., 2019; Powell et al., 2022), future research would benefit from considering whether gender interacts with any of the key facilitators and barriers identified in the current research. Any interactions that are found could have practical benefits, as educational materials and programmes could be tailored to deliver a more nuanced approach.

Regarding the characteristics of the sample, gender minorities were excluded to ensure the statistical viability of the regression model building, but it is important that future research give a voice to minority gender groups when considering IBSA. To date, there is limited research looking at their experiences in relation to IBSA, but there is evidence to suggest that gender dynamics impact bystander intervention in IBSA contexts (see Flynn et al., 2025) and such groups are more likely become victims of sexual harassment and violence (Hindes et al., 2025), suggesting these groups are unique and worthy of further attention. Similarly, future research needs to include a more diverse sample because there is evidence to suggest that bystander behaviour can differ across sexual identity groups (Flynn et al., 2022b) and ethnic groups (Brown et al., 2014; Kania & Cale, 2021). Furthermore, ethnicity and religious beliefs can impact perceptions of what is considered inappropriate image sharing

(see Rackley et al., 2021), so it is important to make people aware of these cultural sensitivities, and how such sensitivities relate to bystander intervention (Mainwaring et al., 2024a).

Second, given the design of these studies (i.e., use of surveys), the causal relationships between the variables of interest (i.e., individual and contextual characteristics) and bystander intervention intent cannot be ascertained. However, in many cases, causal relationships can be inferred by the nature of these relationships and existing empirical evidence. For example, greater feelings of responsibility to intervene is likely to lead to an increase in bystander intervention intent, rather than greater bystander intervention intent leading to an increase in feelings of responsibility. Irrespective, future research should give due consideration to the use of experimental designs to confirm the causal relationships between these characteristics and bystander intervention.

Third, all studies focused on behavioural intentions rather than actual bystander behaviour. This naturally leads to concerns about the validity and application of these findings to actual bystander behaviour. Evidence has shown that the relationship between intentions and actual behaviour can be affected by other variables, such as the relationship with the victim, with intentions being more accurate reflections of actual behaviour in cases where victims are friends of the bystander rather than strangers (Waterman et al., 2021). This suggests that behavioural intentions may not always be a valid indicator of actual behaviour. However, research in SV contexts has consistently found a positive relationship between behavioural intentions and actual bystander behaviour (e.g., Franklin et al., 2017; Kania & Cale, 2021; Waterman et al., 2021). Future research should aim to confirm whether the current findings concerning facilitators and barriers of intervention apply when considering actual bystander behaviour.

Finally, it is important that educational materials are tested empirically because there is a gap in the literature concerning which actions victims and bystanders consider to be the most helpful (Banyard, 2015, 2024). Recent evidence has shown that responses from bystanders to experiences of sextortion (i.e., threats to share) can range from helpful or supportive (e.g., listening to them, being empathic) to unhelpful and even harmful (e.g., judging or disregarding victim; Walsh & Tener, 2022). Therefore, future research is necessary to consider a victim's perspective on what actions can be helpful versus unhelpful, to further inform bystander intervention programmes and provide greater insight into this behaviour in helping to prevent IBSA and the associated negative impacts upon victims and bystanders (Banyard, 2024).

Conclusion

The current research explored the role of individual and contextual characteristics in facilitating or inhibiting bystander intervention for three IBSA contexts. All three final regression models explained over half of the variance in the likelihood of intervention. For the non-consensual taking of images, being female, greater feelings of responsibility, greater confidence to intervene, more positive social norms towards intervention, and greater empathic concern were facilitators of intervention. For the non-consensual sharing of images, greater feelings of responsibility, more positive social norms towards intervention, and less IBSA victimisation experiences were facilitators of intervention. Finally, for making threats to share images, greater feelings of responsibility, greater confidence to intervene, and more positive social norms towards intervention were facilitators of intervention.

It is apparent that greater feelings of responsibility, confidence to intervene, and more positive social norms towards intervention are important facilitators of bystander intervention in IBSA contexts. The current research has expanded on existing findings in terms of examining characteristics which have not yet been considered in the literature, as well as

uncovering those individual and contextual characteristics which may be of most importance in facilitating and inhibiting bystander intervention. These findings have important theoretical and practical implications for bystander intervention agendas in IBSA contexts, including the development of materials and programmes which aim to encourage bystander intervention in these and other SV contexts.

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Footnotes

¹ 131 participants were required for suitable power. All priori power calculations were determined using G*Power (Faul et al., 2009). Sample size estimations were calculated based on the model having 13 predictors (i.e., the number of individual and contextual variables considered).

² When performing PCA for each of the predictor variables, this resulted in more than 13 predictor variables for consideration. In both Studies 1 and 3 this had no detrimental impact on the power to detect a significant effect within the regression models created, as no model created exceeded 13 predictors. However, the initial model for Study 2 included 14 predictors, meaning this model was slightly underpowered.