

Exploring Bystander Presence and Intervention in Nonfatal Violent Victimization: When Does Helping Really Help?

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The current research explores two important issues related to the study of bystander intervention during nonfatal violent victimization. First, using data from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), conjunctive analysis of case configurations is conducted to identify the most dominant situational contexts in which a bystander is present during violent crime. Second, the prevalence of responses in which a bystander helps or hurts during these events is determined. Results and the analytical approach used in this investigation are discussed in terms of their implications for future research on the normative and deviant reactions to crime by third parties and its victims.

Keywords: bystander intervention; third-party involvement; situational context; conjunctive analysis; quantitative comparative analysis

Although much has been written about the victims and offenders of violent crime, an important but relatively neglected situational factor in these offenses involves the presence and role of third parties or bystanders. Bystanders are the social audience in many crime events, and their actions and reactions may affect both the risks of the onset of violence and its ultimate consequences to the victim. As potential witnesses and guardians that may provide direct assistance to victims, bystanders serve as a visible deterrent to crime, and their intervention may help the victim thwart a violent attack in progress. Through poorly executed helping behavior or by serving as public audience for “saving face” or maintaining a masculine identity, however, the presence of bystanders may also escalate the gravity of potential conflict situations. It is these contrasting roles of third parties as impeding and escalating violent situations that contributes to their unique position as correlates of individuals’ risks of criminal victimization.

Using data from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), the current study explores the situational context of bystander intervention in violent crimes. Conjunctive analyses of case configurations are conducted to identify the most dominant situational contexts in which a bystander is present in violent crimes and the relative prevalence of helping and hurting responses within them. Results and the modeling approach used in this study are then discussed in terms of their implications for future research on the normative and deviant reactions to crime by third parties and its victims.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Contrary to their popular image as secluded private acts, most violent crimes are committed in the presence of a social audience. For example, data from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) in the 1990s suggest that bystanders are present in about two-thirds of violent victimizations. Bystanders are present in about 70% of assaults, 52% of robberies, and 29% of the rapes or sexual assaults in these national data (Planty, 2002). According to NCVS data, an estimated 6.4 million violent crimes are witnessed by third parties each year.¹

When witnessing a criminal act or any other potentially dangerous situation, bystanders have several choices. They can ignore the situation and do nothing, offer indirect intervention by summoning the police or other people for help, or directly intervene to assist the victim in thwarting the attack. Previous research on helping behavior suggests that bystander inactivity is the predominant response in a variety of potentially dangerous situations. Field experiments and observational studies reveal that helping behavior is often the exceptional case when people are seriously injured in accidents, have excessive bleeding, or are involved in an intense verbal altercation with another party (see, for review; Fisher, Greitemeyer, Pollozek, & Frey, 2006; Howard & Crano, 1974; Latane & Darley, 1970; Smithson, Amato, & Pearce, 1983). Even when helping involves little direct costs to the bystander, most people do not typically offer assistance to another. The passage of "Good Samaritan" laws and the public designation of people who help others in selfless acts of bravery as heroes is also indirect evidence of the relative infrequency of helping behavior in contemporary American society.

NCVS data do not provide a direct measure of bystander inaction. Instead, victims are asked survey questions about whether third-party involvement "helped or worsened" the situation. Among offenses in which the actions of the third party were known, nearly half the victims reported that the bystander neither helped nor worsened the situation (Planty, 2002). Consistent with general studies of helping behavior, these results also suggest that inactivity is the typical reaction of bystanders who witness violent crimes.

When bystanders intervene in criminal offenses, their behavior is judged far more likely to help than hurt (see Planty, 2002). This ratio of helping/hurting is highest among aggravated assaults (3.5:1) and lowest in cases of rape and sexual assault (2.2:1). The predominant way in which bystanders help is through the "prevention of injury or further injury" to the victim. Bystanders are judged as worsening the situation primarily by "making the offender angrier." Third parties may worsen the situation by overreacting or saying something foolish that escalates the violence. Alternatively, offenders may inflict greater injury to victims in front of third parties as an immediate public forum for maintaining or reaffirming one's masculine identity as a "tough guy" (see Goffman, 1959; Lofland, 1969; Miethe & Deibert, 2007). It is within these public situations that the presence of bystanders may hurt more than help.

NORMATIVE RULES AND THE SITUATIONAL CONTEXT OF BYSTANDER INTERVENTION

Norms are shared evaluations of what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior in a particular social context. Sociologists and criminologists have long used normative explanations for a wide range of conventional and criminal behaviors. Normative rules of appropriate

behavior are found in virtually all aspects of everyday life (e.g., rules of fair play in sports, driving behavior, manners, and etiquette). When applied to criminal behavior, normative theories have been used to explain the onset of criminal behavior and its social, spatial, and temporal distribution (see Miethe & Deibert, 2007). For example, a normative “code of the street” is said to exist within particular segments of society where violence is an expected response to threats to one’s “rep” and other anger-provoking stimuli (see Anderson, 1999; Miethe & Regoeczi, 2004). Normative rules and rituals also underlie the behavior of victims and offenders in other types of criminal activity (see Luckenbill, 1977; Miethe & Deibert, 2007).

Similar to other aspects of social life, various normative rules also exist in the area of helping behavior. These norms of helping behavior offer an explanation for the overall level of bystander intervention and the particular social contexts in which it is facilitated and constrained.

One immediate normative constraint on bystander intervention is the widely held adage of “minding one’s own business.” This norm against meddling is well entrenched in everyday life and may serve as an important heuristic for decision making under conditions of uncertainty. In particular, most bystanders, by definition, are outsiders who are not fully aware of the nature or gravity of an ongoing dispute among the victims and offenders. Otherwise rational thought by these outside observers may also be temporarily suspended by the immediate ambiguity of these dangerous situations. Under these conditions, the normative script of “minding one’s own business” may lead most bystanders to avoid getting involved in the criminal transaction.

Although norms of avoidance may explain the low rate of helping behavior in interpersonal disputes, several situational factors may serve to decrease the ambiguity surrounding criminal offenses and lead to differential likelihoods of bystander responses. These situational factors include the type of criminal activity, presence of a weapon, location of the crime, time of occurrence, and victim-offender relationship. Both the presence of bystanders and their likely response to observed criminal behavior may be strongly influenced by the particular combination of situational factors underlying violent offenses.

THE CURRENT STUDY

The role of bystanders in violent victimization has been widely recognized in crime prevention and as a major structural feature of crime events (see Banyard, Plante, & Moynihan, 2004; Felson, 2002; Kennedy & Forde, 1999; Sacco & Kennedy, 2002; Schwartz, DeKeseredy, Tait, & Alvi, 2001). The correlates of bystander intervention have also been investigated in previous research. Previous studies, however, have not systematically examined the situational context of third-party intervention because their analyses are based on exploring bivariate relationships and estimating “main effect” models. By ignoring the interrelations among variables that define the situational context, the analytical approach used in previous studies may dramatically misrepresent how particular situational factors influence the likelihood and consequence of bystander intervention.

Using NCVS data from 1995 through 2004, the current study identifies the most dominant situational contexts in which bystanders are present in violent crimes and their relative prevalence of helping and hurting responses within them. These situational contexts are defined by the conjunctive distribution of all possible combinations of the following situational factors: type of violent crime, presence of a dangerous weapon, location of the

offense, time of occurrence, and victim-offender relationship. The nature of these dominant situational contexts in which bystanders are present, the relative prevalence of their helping and hurting responses within them, and the implications of these findings are the primary questions underlying the current study.

Methods

Data for this study derive from the National Crime Victimization Surveys (NCVS) that were conducted from 1995 through 2004. Our analysis focuses on the characteristics of violent crime that were reported during this timeframe and where a bystander was present ($n = 19,204$). A subset of these data that represent victimizations where a bystander was reportedly present *and* either helped or worsened the situation are used for the conjunctive analysis ($n = 12,404$). The measurement of the primary variables and the analytical strategy underlying this research are summarized next.

Measurement of Variables. The primary variables in the current study involve measures of bystander involvement and the situational context of violent victimizations. Measures of these concepts were derived from survey questions about the circumstances surrounding criminal victimizations that were identified during NCVS interviews.

Bystander's Presence and Intervention Outcome. Our measures of bystander presence and the effectiveness of their actions in violent situations are based on the victim's account of the crime event. Based on the questions used in the NCVS interview, bystanders are defined as "any person or group of persons other than the victim or offender² who was present during the victimization, and who is at least 12 years of age" (see NCVS, 2003). Under this definition, the term *bystander* includes people who may serve a variety of different roles (e.g., eyewitnesses, instigators, interlopers, other household members, fellow victims in the incident, police officers). In our analysis, the presence of a bystander is dummy coded (1 = present; 0 = absent). Measures of the number of bystanders and their specific roles are not available in the NCVS data.

The perceived effectiveness of bystander intervention is measured by the victim's assessment of whether the bystander helped or worsened the incident. The categories of "neither helped nor worsened" and "both helped and hurt" are also possible responses to this NCVS question. For our analysis of the situational contexts of bystander intervention, this variable is recoded as a ratio representing the relative prevalence of helping/hurting reactions. Higher ratio values indicate situational contexts that are more conducive to effective bystander intervention. In contrast, lower ratios represent situations of bystander intervention that have greater risks of adverse consequences for the victim.³

The Situational Context. The situational context for bystander intervention is measured in this study by the conjunctive distribution of the categories within each of the following situational factors: *type of crime* (i.e., 1 = rape/sexual assaults, 2 = personal robberies, 3 = physical assaults); *weapon present in incident* (0 = no, 1 = yes); *location of offense* (0 = public place, 1 = home/private); *time of occurrence* (0 = daytime, 1 = nighttime); and *victim-offender relationship* (0 = non-stranger, 1 = stranger).⁴

When these variables are considered simultaneously, they represent 48 distinct situational contexts. This total number of situational contexts is found by multiplying together the number of categories within each variable (i.e., 3 [crimes] \times 2 [weapons] \times 2 [locations] \times 2 [time of day] \times 2 [victim-offender relationship] = 48 combinations).

To minimize attention to situational contexts that are rarely found among violent crimes, a minimum frequency rule of 10 cases ($n \geq 10$) is used for inclusion in this study. When

the prevalence of victims in a particular situational context exceeds this minimum frequency, we will use the term *dominant* to represent these situations. Minimum frequency rules have also been used in other studies of conjunctive interrelationships among sets of variables (see Miethe & Regoeczi, 2004; Ragin, 1987). By restricting our analysis to these dominant situations, the current study focuses on empirical identification of the most predominant situations of bystander intervention and its relative effectiveness within them.

Analytical Approach

The current study involves a conjunctive analysis of the nature of the dominant situational contexts for bystander intervention in violent crimes. This approach is similar to qualitative comparative analysis⁵ in that we seek to identify the most common combinations of situational attributes that underlie criminal incidents in which bystanders are present and offer effective intervention within them.

For purposes of identifying normative and deviant patterns of bystander intervention in violent offenses, the current study uses the mean and standard deviation to derive empirical boundaries of normative responses within this NCVS sample. In particular, normative situational contexts for the presence of a bystander and beneficial intervention are those that fall within 1 standard deviation of the average values for all situations combined (i.e., $\bar{x} \pm 1 SD$). Deviant situational contexts for bystander involvement, in contrast, are those situations that fall either above (i.e., they are more helpful than average) or below the overall mean (i.e., they are less helpful than average). This approach allows a rank-ordering of situational attributes that underlie criminal incidents and, in turn, enables us to interpret situations where a bystander is more helpful in the context of the prevalence of the situation.

Results

Univariate and bivariate analyses were performed to assess the general characteristics of violent victimizations in this NCVS sample. The observed results of these analyses are consistent with the findings in other research using NCVS data for earlier time periods (see Planty, 2002). A bystander was present in nearly two-thirds (65%) of the violent victimizations in these NCVS data. Their presence was most common in cases of physical assaults (68%) and less likely in robberies (49%) and sexual assaults (28%). The actions of bystanders were most frequently judged by victims as “neither helping nor hurting” (48%), followed by “helping” (37%), “hurting” (10%), and “both helping and hurting” (3%). Respondents were unable to assess the impact of the bystander in 3% of the cases.⁶

Among the situational variables, physical assaults accounted for the vast majority of these violent victimizations (92%). Of the remaining violent victimizations, robberies (6%) were slightly more common than rapes and sexual assaults (2%). A dangerous weapon was present in about one-fifth (21%) of all violent victimizations. A sizable minority (32%) of violent offenses occurred within the home and other private locations. About two-in-five violent crimes in which a bystander was present occurred during evening hours. Nearly half (45%) of attacks in the presence of bystanders involved victims and offenders who were strangers.

Dominant Situational Contexts for the Presence of a Bystander

Of the 48 possible combinations of situational factors that define the situational context for violent crime, violent victimizations were empirically observed in all of them. Seven of

these profiles contained fewer than 10 victimizations and were excluded from the analysis under this minimum frequency criterion. Table 1 presents the characteristics of the 41 dominant situational contexts for violent crime, ranked in order of their relative proportion of a bystander being present within them.

As shown in Table 1, the likelihood of bystander presence varies dramatically across different situational contexts for violent crime. For example, 83% of the stranger assaults in public places at night that do not involve a dangerous weapon are committed in the presence of bystanders (see Situation #1 in Table 1). In contrast, a bystander is present in only 14% of the weaponless nonstranger rapes or sexual assaults that occur in private locations during the daytime (see Situation #41 in Table 1). The full array of situational contexts in which the likelihood of bystander presence falls outside the normative boundaries of 1 standard deviation from the mean is represented by the shaded areas in Table 1.

An examination of the exceptional or deviant contexts in which bystander's presence is relatively more and less common than the statistical average reveals the distinct role of specific situational factors. Both the type of crime and its physical locations are clearly discriminating factors in these situations, given their representation in the shaded areas of the table. In particular, the highest rates of bystander presence are found in situations of physical assaults in public places, whereas the lowest rates almost always involve sexual assaults in private locations. None of the other situational variables exhibit consistent pattern of "main effects" across these different contexts of high and low bystander presence. Instead, their association with the likelihood of bystander presence is highly contextual, depending on the particular combination of other factors that define the situational context.

Dominant Contexts for the Most and Least Effective Intervention

A bystander offered assistance in 37 different situational contexts that contained at least 10 victimizations. Table 2 summarizes the characteristics of these 37 dominant situational contexts of bystander intervention, arranged in order of the highest to lowest ratio of helping/hurting responses within them. Across these situations, the average helping/hurting ratio was 3.5:1 and the standard deviation was 2.0.⁷ Situational contexts outside the normative boundaries of 1 standard deviation from the mean of these helping ratios are represented by the shaded areas in Table 2.

As shown in Table 2, situations with the highest ratios of helping are most often sexual assaults without a dangerous weapon (see Situation #36, #25, #41, #29). The remaining contexts in which helping exceeds its normative average involved stranger robberies in public places (Situation #19, #30). For both sex offenses and robberies, daytime hours and attacks by strangers are also common elements in most of the situational contexts that elicit the greatest helping responses. The highest ratio of helping behavior occurred in situations of nighttime sexual assaults by strangers in the home and without dangerous weapons. Although this situation is a rare context for bystander witnesses ($n = 21$), their assistance was 10 times more likely to be perceived as helping than worsening these incidents.

The bottom shaded area in Table 2 represents situations in which bystanders help less than the normative average (i.e., helping/hurting ratios of less than 1.5). Most situations with the least effective helping involve nonstranger robberies within the home (Situation #24, #21, #22). Nighttime hours and the absence of dangerous weapons are other situational factors in most of these least helpful situations.

TABLE 1. Situational Factors and the Likelihood a Bystander Is Present

Situation Number	Type of Violence	Weapon	Location	Time	Relationship	Presence
1	Assault	No	Public	Night	Stranger	0.83
2	Assault	No	Public	Day	Nonstranger	0.79
3	Assault	No	Public	Night	Nonstranger	0.79
4	Assault	Yes	Public	Night	Stranger	0.78
5	Assault	Yes	Public	Night	Nonstranger	0.78
6	Assault	No	Private	Night	Stranger	0.76
7	Assault	No	Public	Day	Stranger	0.76
8	Assault	Yes	Public	Day	Nonstranger	0.76
9	Robbery	Yes	Public	Day	Nonstranger	0.74
10	Assault	Yes	Private	Night	Stranger	0.72
11	Assault	Yes	Public	Day	Stranger	0.71
12	Robbery	No	Public	Day	Nonstranger	0.70
13	Robbery	No	Public	Night	Nonstranger	0.69
14	Assault	Yes	Private	Day	Stranger	0.67
15	Assault	No	Private	Day	Stranger	0.64
16	Assault	Yes	Private	Night	Nonstranger	0.62
17	Assault	Yes	Private	Day	Nonstranger	0.61
18	Robbery	No	Public	Day	Stranger	0.61
19	Robbery	No	Public	Night	Stranger	0.57
20	Assault	No	Private	Day	Nonstranger	0.54
21	Robbery	No	Private	Night	Nonstranger	0.54
22	Robbery	Yes	Private	Night	Nonstranger	0.53
23	Assault	No	Private	Night	Nonstranger	0.51
24	Robbery	Yes	Private	Day	Nonstranger	0.50
25	Rape	No	Public	Day	Nonstranger	0.49
26	Robbery	No	Private	Day	Stranger	0.49
27	Rape	No	Public	Night	Stranger	0.48
28	Robbery	No	Private	Day	Nonstranger	0.47
29	Rape	No	Public	Day	Stranger	0.47
30	Robbery	Yes	Public	Day	Stranger	0.47
31	Robbery	No	Private	Night	Stranger	0.46
32	Robbery	Yes	Public	Night	Nonstranger	0.45
33	Robbery	Yes	Private	Night	Stranger	0.43
34	Robbery	Yes	Public	Night	Stranger	0.43
35	Rape	No	Private	Day	Stranger	0.38
36	Rape	No	Private	Night	Stranger	0.36
37	Robbery	Yes	Private	Day	Stranger	0.28
38	Rape	No	Public	Night	Nonstranger	0.27
39	Rape	Yes	Private	Night	Nonstranger	0.25
40	Rape	No	Private	Night	Nonstranger	0.20
41	Rape	No	Private	Day	Nonstranger	0.14

Note. The shaded areas represent situational contexts that fall outside the normative range of the mean + or - 1 standard deviation. For the type of violence categories, rape includes both rape or sexual assault and assault includes both aggravated and simple assault.

TABLE 2. Situational Factors Where a Bystander Helped Versus Hurt

Situation Number	Type of Violence	Weapon	Location	Time	Relationship	N	Helped	Hurt	Help:Hurt
36	Rape	No	Private	Night	Stranger	21	0.48	0.05	10.00
19	Robbery	No	Public	Night	Stranger	61	0.49	0.07	7.50
30	Robbery	Yes	Public	Day	Stranger	74	0.34	0.05	6.25
25	Rape	No	Public	Day	Nonstranger	27	0.44	0.07	6.00
41	Rape	No	Private	Day	Nonstranger	15	0.40	0.07	6.00
29	Rape	No	Public	Day	Stranger	25	0.44	0.08	5.50
18	Robbery	No	Public	Day	Stranger	79	0.33	0.06	5.20
11	Assault	Yes	Public	Day	Stranger	415	0.39	0.08	4.94
17	Assault	Yes	Private	Day	Nonstranger	255	0.40	0.08	4.81
1	Assault	No	Public	Night	Stranger	1,236	0.50	0.11	4.32
10	Assault	Yes	Private	Night	Stranger	140	0.41	0.10	4.14
27	Rape	No	Public	Night	Stranger	29	0.41	0.10	4.00
14	Assault	Yes	Private	Day	Stranger	98	0.44	0.11	3.91
34	Robbery	Yes	Public	Night	Stranger	85	0.36	0.09	3.88
4	Assault	Yes	Public	Night	Stranger	445	0.45	0.12	3.85
7	Assault	No	Public	Day	Stranger	1,531	0.38	0.11	3.57
8	Assault	Yes	Public	Day	Nonstranger	311	0.41	0.13	3.28
15	Assault	No	Private	Day	Stranger	252	0.37	0.12	3.13
2	Assault	No	Public	Day	Nonstranger	1,999	0.36	0.12	2.94
3	Assault	No	Public	Night	Nonstranger	632	0.41	0.14	2.92
5	Assault	Yes	Public	Night	Nonstranger	162	0.39	0.14	2.86
6	Assault	No	Private	Night	Stranger	284	0.42	0.15	2.73
33	Robbery	Yes	Private	Night	Stranger	30	0.27	0.10	2.67
23	Assault	No	Private	Night	Nonstranger	989	0.39	0.15	2.66

20	Assault	No	Private	Day	Nonstranger	890	0.37	0.14	2.62
16	Assault	Yes	Private	Night	Nonstranger	328	0.42	0.16	2.57
12	Robbery	No	Public	Day	Nonstranger	50	0.46	0.18	2.56
31	Robbery	No	Private	Night	Stranger	11	0.45	0.18	2.50
28	Robbery	No	Private	Day	Nonstranger	61	0.44	0.18	2.45
40	Rape	No	Private	Night	Nonstranger	57	0.35	0.18	2.00
9	Robbery	Yes	Public	Day	Nonstranger	17	0.24	0.12	2.00
38	Rape	No	Public	Night	Nonstranger	18	0.22	0.17	1.33
26	Robbery	No	Private	Day	Stranger	17	0.24	0.18	1.33
24	Robbery	Yes	Private	Day	Nonstranger	23	0.22	0.22	1.00
13	Robbery	No	Public	Night	Nonstranger	18	0.39	0.39	1.00
21	Robbery	No	Private	Night	Nonstranger	85	0.27	0.27	1.00
22	Robbery	Yes	Private	Night	Nonstranger	23	0.13	0.22	0.60

Note. The shaded areas represent situational contexts that fall outside the normative range of the mean + or - 1 standard deviation. For the type of violence categories, rape includes both rape or sexual assault and assault includes both aggravated and simple assault. Situation number represents the rank-order of situations based on their relative prevalence of a bystander being present (i.e., the same ranking number used in Table 1).

Situational contexts within the normative range of helping (i.e., the situational profiles *not* shaded in Table 2) are best characterized by instances of physical assaults that occur in a wide variety of circumstances. Aggravated assaults (i.e., physical assaults with weapons) among strangers often have helping ratios in the upper segment of the normative range (see Situation #11, #10, #14, #4), whereas simple assaults (i.e., physical assaults without dangerous weapons) are often in the lower half of this normative range (see Situation #20, #23, #6). Other situational factors exhibit less uniform patterns across this normative range of helping/hurting ratios.

Additional aspects of the context for the most and least extreme helping ratios can be discerned by examining the situation numbers (column 1) and sample sizes (column 7) in Table 2. In particular, the situation numbers in this table represent the ascending rank-order of situations based on their prevalence of a bystander (e.g., Situation #1 and #41 are the situations with the highest and lowest likelihoods of a bystander being present, respectively). A quick perusal of these situation numbers reveals that contexts of above average (mean rank = 30) and below average helping ratios (mean rank = 24) are substantially less likely to occur in situations where a bystander is present than is true of situations that fall within the normative range of helping (mean rank = 16). Similarly, the sample sizes are noticeably smaller in the most (mean $N = 37$) and least helpful (mean $N = 31$) situations than those in the normative range (mean $N = 415$). Together, these results indicate that situational contexts in which helping responses fall outside the normative range are statistically *deviant*; that is, they occur in situations that are both relatively rare contexts for violent crimes in general and when a social audience is present in particular.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The current study explores the situational contexts of bystander intervention in violent crime. Bystanders are most commonly found in situations of physical assaults in public places, and they are rarely witnesses of sexual assaults and rapes in private locations. When bystanders are present, they neither help nor hurt in the typical violent crime; however, bystanders are far more likely to help than hurt in situations of sexual assaults without a dangerous weapon. They are more likely to worsen violent attacks in situations of robberies by nonstrangers in evening hours. These results, their limitations, and implications for future research are discussed next.

Explanations for the Observed Results

Our conjunctive analysis of case configurations in violent crimes indicates that the opportunity for bystander intervention and its consequences vary dramatically across different situational contexts. As a definitional property of these locations, the higher observed prevalence of bystander presence in public places and the lower likelihood of witnesses in private places require little additional explanation. The patterns of situational variability in the relative ratios of helping and hurting responses of third parties, however, may be attributed to a variety of theoretical explanations.

Normative explanations have been used to understand helping behavior and its situational constraints and facilitators in a variety of contexts. It is also the dominant explanation for the observed results in this study. In particular, norms of minding one's own business are pervasive in contemporary American society, and the fact that most bystanders neither help nor hurt may be indicative of this wider context of apathy.

When bystanders intervene in violent crime, their response may also be dictated by normative expectations. For example, situations of above-average helping behavior are often sexual assaults by strangers without dangerous weapons. The cumulative impact of norms of chivalry (because most sexual assaults involve female victims), less ambiguity in interpreting the situation as a crime (because of the sexual attack by a stranger), and the relatively lower risks of physical injury to the bystander (because a dangerous weapon is not present) may serve as visual situational cues that increase the likelihood of beneficial intervention. In contrast, situations in which bystanders are less helpful than the normative average are often robberies by nonstrangers that occur within the home. The bystander's violation of the norms of privacy and meddling in affairs of known parties in private settings may explain why the actions of bystanders are more commonly interpreted by victims as worsening rather than helping in these situations.

A normative explanation may also account for the situational contexts of extreme forms of helping ratios that fall outside the normative thresholds of within 1 standard deviation of the statistical mean. In particular, these social contexts of helping behavior were shown to be exceptional or "deviant" circumstances, both in terms of their relative rarity as contexts for violent crime in general and for offenses that occur in the presence of a bystander. Within these rare contexts for violent crime, it may be the novelty of the particular criminal incident and a particular combination of other situational factors (e.g., age, race, gender of the participants) that result in the extreme forms of helping and hurting within these situations. Although numerically less prevalent than other contexts for bystander intervention, these types of deviant contexts of extreme forms of helping or apathy often serve as the basis for both media attention and public policy on the role of third parties in crime prevention.

The present study uses conjunctive analysis because we assume that this is the proper specification of the interrelationships among situational factors that define the social context for bystander intervention. An alternative specification, however, is a "main effects" model that assumes that the effects of any particular situational factor are constant across levels of the other variables. When a "main effects" regression model is used for predicting the helping/hurting ratio, only the type of crime exhibited a significant main effect. In particular, when compared to sexual assaults as the reference category, both physical assaults and robberies were related to significantly lower ratios of helping/hurting. None of the other situational factors (i.e., weapon use, location, time of day, victim-offender relationship) were significantly associated with this outcome variable under this regression model.

Although a more parsimonious specification of the functional form of the relationship among a set of variables, the limitations of a "main effect" model for studying situational contexts can be illustrated by several observations. First, as shown in Table 2, the effect of type of crime on the helping ratio is not consistent across contexts. For example, there are clearly situations in which robbery is linked with higher helping ratios than most situations involving rapes (see Situation #19 and #30), but the main effect model ignores these differences. Similar circumstances are found for comparisons of helping ratios in situations of rape versus physical assaults, but these differences are also blurred in this alternative model. Second, although the "main effects" model suggests that other situational factors are largely ignorable because their effects are not statistically significant, a close examination of these variables in Table 2 suggests that their effects may be rather dramatic, depending on the particular combination of other situational factors associated with them. It is because of the formal recognition of the conjunctive effects of variables

as defining the situational context for violent crimes that we question the utility of a “main effects” modeling approach and instead use a conjunctive analysis in this study. For each variable in this analysis, it is their conjunctive impact with other situational factors that best represents whether a bystander’s response will be viewed as relatively more likely to help or hurt.

Limitations of the Current Study

As a basis for studying bystander intervention in violent crimes, the NCVS data used in the present study have several limitations that restrict our substantive conclusions. For example, these data do not include violent crimes that are deterred by the mere presence of third parties. The measure of bystander intervention also does not provide sufficient information on the number of bystanders, their particular roles, the type of assistance offered (e.g., physical intervention or indirect aid by summoning help) or whether the response “neither helped nor hurt” is inclusive of all cases in which bystanders did not offer any assistance at all. Some of what may be driving the differences in bystander helpfulness within the different situational contexts is the particular role of the bystander and/or number of bystanders present. It is possible that there are systematic differences associated with the type and/or number of bystanders by these situational contexts, but the data used in the current study cannot address these issues.

Although limitations of the sample and measures restrict our inferences about the prevalence of bystander intervention in violent crimes, these problems do not limit our conclusions about the dominant contexts in which a bystander helps or hurts in criminal offenses that are attempted or completed. For this type of research question, the national scope of these data collection, the large number of victimizations included in them, and their wide availability for secondary analysis contribute to the NCVS data’s unique value for studying third-party involvement in violent victimizations. Even with its limitations, there are no other comparable data for studying the situational contexts for bystander intervention than NCVS data.

Implications for Future Research

Most previous criminological research has recognized the importance of the situational context for understanding crime events. The typical analytical approach used in this research, however, rarely is designed to assess this situational context because the unit of analysis is the individual victim or offense. As an alternative to conventional methods for discrete multivariate analysis, consistent with the research of others (see Miethe & Regoeczi, 2004; LaFree & Birkbeck, 1991), we use a conjunctive analysis of case configurations to identify the most dominant social contexts for violent crimes and bystander intervention within them.

Similar to qualitative comparative analysis, we think this type of conjunctive analysis would be useful for studying various aspects of criminal behavior and victimization. For example, studies of situational crime prevention often focus on the “main effects” of particular characteristics rather than assessing whether the effectiveness of a particular intervention (e.g., neighborhood watch) is relatively more or less likely in different situational contexts (see Elliot et al., 1996; Piquero & Tibbetts, 1996). Similarly, studies of the prevalence and effectiveness of self-protective actions by victims in criminal victimizations are also easily amenable to this type of conjunctive analysis of situational factors (see Kleck & DeLone, 1993; Kleck & McElrath, 1991; Tark & Kleck, 2004). We hope this

application of conjunctive analysis to studying bystander intervention and its effectiveness serves as a model for further study of crime and victimization in these other substantive areas.

The results and implications of the current study can be briefly summarized. Bystander intervention and its consequences are not uniform across different situational contexts. Depending on the particular combination of situational factors, some contexts are more conducive to the presence of bystanders. Some situational contexts are also associated with relatively high levels of helping responses, whereas other situations are linked to lower ratios of helping and more damaging consequences to the victims. By applying conjunctive analysis in future studies of crime and victimization, the results of the current research and its analytical approach may offer an alternative method for studying the situational context of criminal acts and the role of bystanders, victims, and offenders within these social contexts.

NOTES

1. Although some comparisons between victims and nonvictims of violence can be made using NCVS data (i.e., gender, race/ethnicity, etc.), nonvictims are not asked questions about the presence or actions of bystanders that may have deterred a crime. Therefore, NCVS data underestimate the role of third parties in violent crime because these surveys do not measure crimes deterred by the mere presence of bystanders. Interviews with convicted offenders indicate that the presence of bystanders or witnesses is a major deterrent factor in their target selection decisions (see Feeney, 1986; Sacco & Kennedy, 2002; Wright & Decker, 1997). The role of third parties in violent crimes would become even more prevalent if this deterrent effect of bystanders was also factored into the estimates provided by the NCVS. Under these conditions, bystanders have the potential to affect the likelihood and outcome of most violent crimes in American society.

2. Only nonfatal violent victimizations involving a single offender were included in the analysis; that is, incidents involving multiple offenders were excluded. Approximately 20% of violent offenses identified in the NCVS involve multiple offenders.

3. The helping-to-hurting ratio was calculated by dividing the average helping score for each situational context by its corresponding average hurting score. For example, if a particular situational context was associated with 100 victimizations where a bystander was present ($n = 100$) and half of the victims indicated that the bystander intervened in such a way as to *help* the incident, then the average helping score would be one-half ($50/100 = .50$). On the other hand, if 10 of the victims associated with the same situational context indicated that the bystander *worsened* the incident, then the hurting score would be $.10$ ($10/100 = .10$). Dividing the average helping score by the corresponding average hurting score for this situational context would result in a helping-to-hurting ratio of 5 ($.50/.10 = 5$). Interpreting the results for this example, a bystander would be five times more likely to help than hurt when they intervene in this particular situational context.

4. The coding of these situational variables is self-explanatory in most cases by the labels of the categories. The coding of each variable, however, requires some clarification. For example, the crime category of "physical assaults" includes both aggravated and simple assaults. The coding of "weapon present" includes guns, knives, blunt objects, and "other" weapons. For the location of the crime, the category "home" includes offenses that occur within or near the home of the victim or relative/friend. "Nighttime" is represented by the time frame of 6:00 P.M. to 6:00 A.M., and the category of "nonstranger" for the measure of the victim-offender relationship includes spouse, boy/girlfriend, partners, child, other relative, friend, or acquaintance.

5. In general, QCA views cases as complex configurations of elements and assumes causal complexity (i.e., there are multiple cases of the same outcome and that any particular variable may or may not be causally related to an outcome depending on context and the nature of the other elements

of the case). For a detailed explanation of QCA and its application, see Ragin (1987, 2000) and Miethe and Regoeczi (2004), respectively.

6. These percentages do not add to 100% owing to rounding.

7. This ratio means that, on average, bystanders are 3.5 times more likely to help than hurt in violent situations in which they are present. These ratings of helping or hurting responses are based on the victim's account of the criminal situations.

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