INVESTIGATING THE UTILITY OF THE FILM WAR ZONE IN THE PREVENTION OF STREET HARASSMENT

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Street harassment, the act of sexual harassment by strangers in public, is a common experience shared by many women. This paper reports the first experimental evaluation of the impact of a popular documentary-style film, War Zone, on men’s attitudes toward street harassment and empathy for women who experience it. The sample was an ethnically diverse group of undergraduate men attending an urban university (N = 98). Given the film’s primary focus on women’s perspectives and the relation of street harassment to rape, we predicted the film would decrease acceptance of street harassment and increase empathy toward women who experience street harassment. We did not find support for these main effects. Hostility toward women, however, was negatively related to cognitive empathy and feelings of distress following the film, and hostility toward women moderated the effect of film condition on distress. Peer acceptance predicted greater self-acceptance of street harassment. Implications for future street harassment research and prevention strategies are discussed.

Street harassment, sexual harassment by strangers in public, is an expected part of womanhood (Bowman, 1993; Gardner, 1995). Street harassment includes catcalls, whistles, and sexual gestures and comments. It shares defining features with sexual assault: Targets are most often women, initiators are most often men, and targets are forced to endure the often degrading, objectifying, and threatening behavior (Bowman, 1993; Lenton, Smith, Fox, & Morra, 1999; Quina, 1990). Compared to other forms of sexual victimization, the phenomenon of street harassment is understudied. This paper reports findings from an experimental examination of whether a popular film, War Zone (Hadleigh-West, 1998), affects men’s acceptance of street harassment and empathy for women who experience street harassment and whether these impacts are moderated by peer attitudes and hostility toward women.

No prevalence figures for street harassment are available for the United States, but one study estimated that 77% of Canadian women have experienced street harassment in their lifetime (Lenton et al., 1999). Recalling these experiences, 75% reported initially feeling fear, 20% reported feeling angry, and 7.4% reported feeling violated. In another study, U.S. women found the behavior offensive and fear-inducing and reported changing their behavior to avoid future harassment (Gardner, 1995). Of the 293 women interviewed, only 9 did not see street harassment as “troublesome” (Gardner, 1995). Interestingly, men rated other men’s intentions as more nefarious than did women (Packer, 1986). Although street harassment may be viewed as less severe relative to other forms of sexual victimization, it may contribute to women’s discomfort and fear in public spaces, possibly limiting access to public resources (Yeoh & Yeow, 1997; Bowman, 1993; Macmillian, Nierobisz, & Welsh, 2000). Moreover, street harassment may contribute to a rape-supportive environment by providing a context in which women are viewed as available for men’s sexual objectification and domination (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997).

Activists have raised awareness about street harassment (Anti-Street Harassment UK, 2007; Holla Back NYC, 2007; Street Harassment Coalition, 2006), in part through wide dissemination of War Zone, a unique documentary that explores street abuse (i.e., street harassment). The film captures viewers’ attention with creative cinematography, interviews, and evocative depictions of street harassment. The filmmaker, Maggie Hadleigh-West, shows men making
sexual comments or gestures toward her and other women on streets in New Orleans, Chicago, and New York. She interviews some of these men about their behavior and a number of women about their reactions. The film highlights the often distressing and negative impacts of street harassment, emphasizing the relationship of street harassment to rape and fear of rape.

War Zone has been shown extensively on college campuses and by the Department of Defense (Film Fatale Inc., 2007). Anti–street harassment organizations, such as the Street Harassment Coalition, strongly assert that the film changes men’s attitudes (personal communication, Street Harassment Coalition, 2006). Despite widespread use of War Zone, the impact of the film has not been empirically evaluated. The purpose of this study was to assess the film’s effect on acceptance of street harassment and empathy for women who experience street harassment, two potential intermediate outcomes in street harassment prevention. Further, because the impact of prevention programs may be moderated by individual and social context variables (Brecklin & Forde, 2001; Kearny, Rochlen, & King, 2004; Stephens & George, 2004; Winkel & de Kleuver, 1997), we predicted that these direct effects would be moderated by hostility toward women and peer acceptance of street harassment.

Effects on Acceptance of Street Harassment

Social judgment theory suggests that persuasive messages, like those found in prevention programs, may influence how acceptable one finds an attitude or behavior (Sherif & Hovland, 1961). In fact, decreasing rape-myth acceptance and sexual harassment tolerance, two factors related to perpetration, are common goals in prevention programs (Lanier, 2001; Reilly, Lott, Caldwell, & DeLuca, 1992). Relatedly, acceptance of street harassment may precede engaging in street harassment and, thus, be a target for change as a means of preventing street harassment. Given War Zone’s emphasis on the negative impact of street harassment, we expected the film to decrease men’s acceptance of street harassment.

Peer Acceptance as a Moderator of the Film’s Impact on Acceptance of Street Harassment

Peers strongly influence attitudes and behaviors related to sexual victimization perpetration (Abbey, McAuslan, Zawacki, Clinton, & Buck, 2001; DeKeseredy & Kelly, 1995; Quinn, 2002). Within social groups, men may perceive that sexually victimizing behaviors are acceptable (Pryor, LaVite, & Stoller, 1993). For instance, in two experimental studies of sexual joke telling with 81 undergraduate, primarily Caucasian, men, participants exposed to men who either told sexual jokes to an unknown woman or expressed sexist attitudes toward women engaged in more sexual joke telling toward an unknown woman than did men who had not been exposed to such peer behavior or attitudes (Angelone, Hirschman, Suniga, Arney, & Armelie, 2005). Similarly, in Pryor et al.’s work (1993), men prone to engage in sexual harassment compared to men low in likelihood to sexually harass were more likely to interact sexually with a female confederate after they had observed another man engaged in a similar manner. Because street harassment most often occurs when men are in groups (Gardner, 1995), men whose peers support street harassment may resist persuasive messages. Therefore, although we expected the film to decrease acceptance of street harassment, we hypothesized that this effect would be less for men whose peers find street harassment acceptable.

Effects on Empathy for Women Who Experience Street Harassment

Empathy is generally understood to have cognitive and/or affective components (Baston, O’Quin, Fultz, Vanderplas, & Isen, 1983; Davis, 1994; Marshall, Hudson, Jones, & Fernandez, 1995). The cognitive component refers to the ability to take another’s perspective, whereas the affective component refers to emotional responses to another’s experience. Emotional responses may include distress (e.g., alarmed or upset) or sympathy (e.g., compassionate or moved) when witnessing another’s suffering (Baston et al., 1983). A lack of empathy has been identified in sexual victimization perpetration (Marshall et al., 1995; Marshall & Moulden, 2001; Quinn, 2002). Empathy is frequently targeted by sexual assault and harassment prevention programs (Brecklin & Forde, 2001; O’Donohue, Downs, & Yeater, 1998; O’Donohue, Yeater, & Fanetti, 2003). In a qualitative study, Quinn (2002) suggested men actually suppress empathic abilities toward women who are sexually harassed so as not to hinder their participation in a behavior that maintains male camaraderie. Further, she posited that men may suppress empathy toward sexually harassed women in an effort to adhere to masculine prescriptions that require not taking a woman’s perspective. War Zone may increase men’s empathy for women because it invites the viewer to understand women’s perspectives on street harassment and uses poignant images to portray women’s almost uniformly distressing experiences and fears related to harassment.

Hostility Toward Women as a Moderator of the Film’s Impact on Empathy

Hostility toward women is so often implicated in sexual harassment and assault perpetration (Abbey & McAuslan, 2004; Malamuth, Linz, Heavey, Barnes, & Acker, 1995; Marshall & Moulden, 2001; Murnen, Wright, & Kaluzny, 2002; Pryor, 1987) that it is reasonable to suggest that men’s hostility toward women may stymie prevention efforts. Convicted male rapists have reported greater hostility toward women than have male nonsexual offenders (Marshall & Moulden, 2001). Hostility toward women predicted sexual assault perpetration among college males during
the previous year (Abbey & McAuslen, 2004), and, among male university students, hostility toward women has been a stronger predictor of sexual coercion than other types of attitudes about women (e.g., sexism) and attitudes about sexual assault (e.g., rape myth acceptance; Forbes, Adams-Curtis, & White, 2004). Hostile sexism, a highly related construct, is repeatedly indicated in sexual victimization perpetration in college samples (Abbey et al., 2001; Begany & Milburn, 2002; Caron & Carter, 1997; Forbes et al., 2004). For example, Begany and Milburn (2002) demonstrated in a diverse sample of undergraduate men that hostile sexism functioned as a mediator between dominating and punitive attitudes (authoritarianism) and self-reported likelihood of engaging in sexual harassment. We expected that hostility toward women would moderate the film’s impact on men’s empathy for women who experience street harassment. Specifically, we expected men with high hostility to show less change in empathy than those low in hostility.

Summary of Hypotheses

In summary, we hypothesized direct and moderating effects of the film’s impact. First, we proposed that men who viewed War Zone would report less acceptance of street harassment than men who viewed the control film and that peer acceptance would moderate this effect. Second, we hypothesized that men who viewed War Zone would report more empathy than men who viewed the comparison film and that hostility toward women would moderate this effect.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

Participants for this study were 98 male undergraduate psychology students at a southeastern urban university enrolled in an introduction to psychology course. Men ranged in age from 18 to 40 (M = 20.72, SD = 3.59) and were ethnically diverse, with Whites comprising 60% of the sample, followed by African Americans (20%), Multiracial participants (7%), East Asians (6%), those of other backgrounds (3%), South Asians (2%), and Latinos (2%). Men were excluded from this study if they identified as homosexual in an open-format question.

Men were solicited for participation via an Internet Web site affiliated with the Department of Psychology. In groups of 10 or fewer, participants reviewed their rights in the Institutional Review Board–approved study, including the confidentiality of their participation and anonymity of their responses to the questions, and consented to participation. Participants then viewed a film, completed a set of measures, and were debriefed. The study took less than 2 hours to complete, and participants were compensated with class credit.

Design

This experiment used an independent groups design, with one experimental and one comparison condition. Participants were randomly assigned to groups of 10 or fewer, and groups were randomly assigned to the experimental or comparison condition. Participants in the comparison condition viewed Under Antarctica Ice (Wu, 1999), a documentary about landscapes and ocean life inhabiting the sea beneath the ice of Antarctica. We chose Under Antarctica Ice because, although we expected it to be interesting, we did not expect it to induce any particular emotion, and the content of the film was unrelated to human sexual behavior. A total of 16 data collection sessions were conducted: 8 sessions viewed War Zone and 8 viewed Under Antarctica Ice. Films were shown by a male or female researcher, and we found no effects for gender of researcher on any study variable. Measure sets were counterbalanced to reconcile potential order effects.

Variables and Measures

Unless stated otherwise, all measures were summed to create total scores where higher total scores indicate greater endorsement of the variable.

Acceptance of street harassment. An 11-item acceptance of street harassment measure modeled after Goodchilds and Zellman’s (1984) measure of sexual aggression acceptance was developed to assess men’s acceptance of street harassment. Participants rated how acceptable street harassment would be in 11 circumstances on a scale from 1 (not at all acceptable) to 5 (very acceptable). A common stem in each question was, “How acceptable do you think it is for a man to make an unsolicited, unreciprocated, and unnecessary comment toward an unknown woman on the street (for example, saying ‘hey baby’ or ‘nice ass’).” The questions concluded with 1 of 11 situations: when she is attractive, is dressed in sexy clothing (e.g., short skirt, tight clothes), makes eye contact with him, smiles at him, is alone, is with her friends, is with a man, is with her children, he is alone, he is with his friends, and he is in an unfamiliar neighborhood. The scale yielded high internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha = .94).

Peer acceptance of street harassment. Using the same method as above, we created an 11-item peer acceptance of street harassment measure. Men were asked, “How acceptable do you think your friends think it is for a man to make an unsolicited, unreciprocated, and unnecessary comment toward an unknown woman on the street (for example, saying ‘hey baby’ or ‘nice ass’)” under the same 11 different conditions above. Internal consistency was again strong (Cronbach’s alpha = .95).

Empathy. We measured three components of empathy: one cognitive and two affective. To measure
cognitive empathy, we adapted the Rapist Empathy Measure (Fernandez & Marshall, 2003), which assesses the perception that rape results in negative consequences for women. Men were asked to read a brief vignette: “A woman is walking down the street when she hears a man who she does not know whistle at her and say, ‘nice ass.’” They then indicated whether the woman was feeling complimented, offended, proud, ashamed, self-confident, guilty, pleased, afraid, angry, and safe on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 10 (very much). The 10 feelings were selected based on previous research (Gardner, 1995; Lenton et al., 1999) and anecdotal data from our own prior work on women’s experiences of street harassment. In a separate pilot study using a similar sample, internal validity was high (Cronbach’s alpha = .90; Fernandez & Marshall, 2003), and in this study alpha was .82.

To measure two affective components (distress and sympathy) of empathy, we used the 14-item Emotional Response Questionnaire (Baston et al., 1983). To assess distress, men rated how alarmed, grieved, upset, worried, disturbed, perturbed, distressed, and troubled they felt. Men responded on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely). Internal consistency estimates in previous work ranged from .79 to .94 (Baston et al., 1983) for both measures and were strong in this sample (.93 and .86 for distress and sympathy, respectively).

**Hostility toward women.** We selected two variables to represent hostility toward women: hostile attitudes toward women and hostile sexism. To measure hostile attitudes toward women, we used Lonsway and Fitzgerald’s (1995) 10-item adapted version of the Hostility Toward Women Scale (Check, Malamuth, Elias, & Barton, 1985). This widely accepted scale contains statements such as “I feel that many times women flirt with men just to tease them or hurt them,” and “I am easily angered by women.” Men reported their degree of agreement, from 1 (agree) to 7 (disagree), with 10 statements. In this sample, Cronbach’s alpha was .83.

Second, we used the hostile sexism subscale of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1996) to measure hostile sexism. This measure asks men to report their agreement with 13 statements reflecting negative and prejudicial attitudes toward women on a scale from 0 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly). Sample items are, “Women seek to gain power by getting control over men” and “Women are too easily offended.” In this sample, Cronbach’s alpha was .86.

**Statistical Analyses**

Main effects of film condition on acceptance of street harassment and empathy, as well as moderating effects of peer acceptance and hostility toward women, were examined using the correlational multiple regression system (Cohen & Cohen, 1975). Hierarchical regression analyses tested main and moderating effects following accepted procedures using centered interaction terms (Baron & Kenny, 1986). The level of statistical significance was set to $p < .05$ for all analyses.

Each variable was evaluated for missing data, deviations from normality, and outliers ($SD > 3$). Few data were missing (i.e., less than 5% per variable), with no apparent pattern; therefore, missing data were replaced with the mean of that item within film condition (Allison, 2001). Acceptance of street harassment, peer acceptance of street harassment, and sympathy were significantly positively skewed and, therefore, transformed by computing the natural log of the variable. Descriptive statistics are reported for the original raw data for clarity of interpretation.

**RESULTS**

**Descriptive statistics**

Men in this study reported low acceptance of street harassment, as reflected in scores a little above the “not at all acceptable” category (Table 1). Men in both conditions reported that their peers were more accepting of street harassment than themselves, $t(46) = -5.92, p < .01, r^2 = .46$, for the War Zone group and, $t(50) = -4.78, p < .01, r^2 = .62$, for the comparison group. On average, men reported that women experience more negative than positive affective reactions to street harassment (cognitive empathy), although they also reported low levels of distress and sympathy (below the midpoint for the scale) for a woman being street harassed. Men tended to score just at or below the midpoint of the scale for both hostility toward women and hostile sexism, suggesting that, as a group, they do not strongly endorse hostility toward women, nor do they strongly reject it. A correlation matrix depicting relationships among study variables is provided in Table 1. Film condition was not related to any of the study variables, but statistically significant relationships were apparent between many of the study variables.

We hypothesized that men who viewed War Zone would report less acceptance of street harassment than men who viewed the comparison film but that this effect would be moderated by peer acceptance of street harassment. However, men who viewed War Zone did not report less acceptance of street harassment compared to men who viewed the comparison film (see Table 2). Further, peer acceptance did not moderate the relationship between film condition and acceptance of street harassment; however, men’s peer acceptance was strongly related to men’s own acceptance of street harassment.

We also predicted that men who viewed War Zone would score higher on the empathy measures (i.e., cognitive empathy, distress, and sympathy) than men who viewed the
Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Preliminary Relations Among Study Variables (N = 98)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>War Zone (n = 47)</th>
<th>Under Antarctica Ice (n = 51)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M^a</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Film condition^b</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Acceptance</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.39*</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
<td>-.23*</td>
<td>-.23*</td>
<td>.27*</td>
<td>.24*</td>
<td>.74*</td>
<td>6.60</td>
<td>1.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Cognitive empathy</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.43*</td>
<td>.24*</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>-.34*</td>
<td>0–10</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>2.45</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Distress</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.57*</td>
<td>-.22*</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>1–7</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Sympathy</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>1–7</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Hostile attitudes toward women</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.61*</td>
<td>.24*</td>
<td>1–7</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Hostile sexism</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>0–5</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Peer acceptance</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1–5</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>.95</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

^aScale item means.
^bFilm condition (0 = War Zone and 1 = Under Antarctica Ice).
*p < .05.

Table 2
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses Examining the Effect of War Zone on Acceptance of Street Harassment, Moderated by Peer Acceptance of Street Harassment (N = 98)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>β</th>
<th>Δ in R^2</th>
<th>Final model adjusted R^2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance of street harassment^a</td>
<td>-.27</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film condition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer acceptance</td>
<td>.69*</td>
<td>.52*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film condition × peer acceptance</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.51*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^aNatural log transformation of original variable.
*p < .05.

despite the film’s powerful techniques, men who viewed War Zone did not report less acceptance of street harassment or more empathy for women who experience street harassment relative to men who viewed a comparison film. We did observe, however, that the film had a polarizing impact on some men’s reports of empathy—a finding that warrants caution. Although these data may be disappointing to the film’s advocates, relationships between study variables hold import for street harassment prevention.

A range of methodological issues may explain our generally null findings. First, low ratings of acceptance of street harassment and low variability in this variable may have contributed to a floor effect, making change in this variable difficult, if not impossible, to detect. This variable may be vulnerable to social desirability, which we did not measure. Second, we assessed outcomes immediately after participants viewed the film, without any intervening discussion. Discussion of the film’s central messages may
have produced additional change in outcomes. Allowing time for reflection and observation of real-life interactions on the street after the film may also contribute toward change. Of course, a one-time intervention, no matter how powerful, may simply be inadequate to change attitudes built through years of socialization. Third, the study relied on self-report with attendant limitations. Finally, we selected the intermediate outcome variables of acceptance and empathy based on our analysis of the film’s intent and review of the prevention literature for sexual assault and harassment. It is possible that other variables may better capture the impact of the film. We measured acceptance of street harassment rather than intention or likelihood to engage in street harassment, which has been predictive of perpetration and harassment-supportive attitudes (Pryor et al., 1993). Further, we asked about unsolicited, unreciprocated, and unnecessary comments toward an unknown woman on the street. This description could include a range of behaviors that vary in acceptability. A more comprehensive measure providing specific examples of different types of behaviors may be more sensitive to change. Similarly, our empathy measure provided only a generic example of street harassment.

Certain characteristics of the film may also limit change in outcomes, or provoke differences in unintended ways. The filmmaker takes a confrontational approach. She elicits defensiveness from men in the film, and, inadvertently, she may also do so in men viewing the film. Her stance may have enhanced the relation between distress and hostile attitudes toward women. In fact, sexual victimization prevention research has found that a confrontational message can stymie prevention efforts and should be avoided. Researchers advise prevention approaches to engage with men as allies in creating safety rather than confront them as potential perpetrators (Fabiano, Perkins, Berkowitz, Linkenbach, & Stark, 2003; Breitenbecher, 2000). Further, the film focuses on women’s experiences with street harassment. Empathy-based prevention approaches that focus on women as victims and men as perpetrators may not be effective (Breitenbecher, 2000) because they increase defensiveness among men (Foubert & Perry, 2007) or because men are discouraged from taking women’s perspectives (Quinn, 2002). A promising strategy for change in empathy may be to depict the perspective of men who are street harassed by men, as has similarly been done for rape prevention (Foubert & Perry, 2007). Finally, peer-facilitated programs are received better than those led by opposite sex or nonpeer individuals (Lonsway, 1996), whereas War Zone is a female-facilitated presentation.

Although our data failed to support our primary hypotheses, we believe that our findings can inform prevention efforts. For example, hostility toward women appears to be related to empathy. Specifically, we observed that hostility toward women in general was related to lower cognitive and affective empathy for women who experience street harassment. Men who hold hostile attitudes toward women ascribe to the idea that women enjoy or deserve sexual domination and victimization (Abrams, Viki, Masser, & Bohnen, 2003). Likewise, men with hostile attitudes toward women may misperceive the impact of street harassment, thereby negating its negative consequences, resulting in a lack of felt distress for victims. In contrast, neither hostile attitudes toward women nor hostile sexism influenced sympathy. Table 1 suggests men endorsed sympathetic feelings less than distressful feelings, which may reflect discomfort men have reporting experiencing traditionally feminine feelings due to male gender proscriptions (Kilmartin, 2000). It is possible that affective empathy was better measured by the distress rather than the sympathy subscale.

Our investigation also highlights the importance of identifying potential negative impacts of prevention
interventions. In this case, for men who reported high levels of hostility toward women, the film had a negative impact: They reported less distress after the film than men who reported average or low levels of hostility. Hence, high levels of hostility may actually block the film’s impact. We suspect that this interaction between hostile attitudes toward women and film condition result from the film’s confrontational approach, which may trigger hostile feelings and prevent increases in empathy.

Further, consistent with social norms theory, men’s report of their peers’ acceptance of street harassment strongly predicted their own acceptance, supporting the importance of men’s peer groups on men’s attitudes related to sexual victimization (Baer, Stacy, & Larimer, 1991; Fabiano et al., 2003; Scholly, Katz, Gascoigne, & Holek, 2005; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). Thus, even if men do not think street harassment is acceptable or particularly rewarding, they may feel pressured to engage in it if they are a part of a peer group they believe supports the behavior. These data support the use of a social norms approach to prevention of street harassment. A social norms approach would aim to correct misperceptions in norms that motivate men to engage in harassment behavior as a means of meeting role expectations (Fabiano et al., 2003).

Conversely, the strong relation between men’s and their peers’ acceptance of street harassment could illustrate that men select friends that permit and encourage the expression of assaultive behaviors so that their belief systems are validated and they retain friends, as has been suggested by Kanin in his work on peer reference groups (Kanin, 1967). In this case, social norms approaches may be ineffective. Instead, bystander approaches may be indicated, where those with less tolerance for street harassment are empowered to intervene in potentially harassing situations (Banyard, Moynihan, & Plante, 2007). Both social norms and bystander approaches shift from targeting potential perpetrators and victims to targeting all men and women to intervene in potentially harmful behavior or situations. Strengths of the social norms and bystander approaches include recognizing the context in which the behavior occurs, broadening the impact of prevention efforts, and using a nonconfrontational approach to engage men as allies in ending sexual victimization.

War Zone is a powerful film that objects to the notion that street harassment is innocuous. Our observations of responses to the film on our own campus led us to experimentally evaluate the film’s impact on two intermediate outcomes: acceptance and empathy. Although our findings were largely negative, we believe that there is more to understand about the impact of War Zone and its potential in education, awareness, and preventive interventions, particularly with respect to undesired outcomes. We offer this study as an initial contribution to the empirical literature on street harassment prevention.

**REFERENCES**


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