



Expansion and replication of the theory of vicarious help-seeking

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ABSTRACT

Gatekeepers are those in a position to recognize, in others, potentially problematic presenting issues, and who are willing and able to connect those persons to relevant service providers. In the domain of violence prevention, they represent a network of those who can serve as ‘first responders’ with respect to helping those in need. Therefore, it is important to understand both the facilitators and inhibitors of gatekeeper intervention, or what has been termed ‘vicarious help-seeking:’ the intent to help others who appear in need of help, but who are not actively seeking help. The present set of studies demonstrated both an expansion of the theory of vicarious help-seeking and a replication of its original four tenets (Part 1). Part 2 examined how gatekeepers would prefer to intervene in a violence prevention context: their natural inclinations with respect to doing so. Part 3 examined reasons preventing gatekeepers from reaching out to a third-party for assistance. Part 4 further examined who – in addition to friends – might be most influential/effective, as gatekeepers.

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The importance of gatekeepers

Gatekeepers are those in a position to recognize, in others, potentially problematic presenting issues, and who are willing and able to connect those persons to relevant service providers (Frederico & Davis, 1996). Gatekeepers can be comprised of those who, by nature of their profession, are closely involved with members of the public (e.g. physicians, teachers), but also can include family members and friends. Ideally, persons of concern are identified at early stages of a given problem, and are referred, by those who care about them, to services that can effectively help that person to overcome and/or cope with the problem.

Such gatekeepers are especially vital, given that no valid risk indicators currently exist to predict individuals’ engagement in, or support of, ideologically-motivated violence (Williams, Horgan, & Evans, 2016b). Given this, gatekeepers’ awareness and concern for their friends and loved ones might be the best early warning system available to prevent such violence: an assertion supported by research conducted both in Los

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Angeles and metro Washington, DC (Williams, Horgan, & Evans, 2016a). Therefore, evidence-driven prevention efforts would do well to empower gatekeepers to shepherd those, about whom they care, to service providers relevant to preventing ideologically-motivated violence (e.g. psychologists, faith leaders, or other social service providers).

Such cases represent a crucial time point to empower local citizens to intervene, because – in such cases – the worrisome, albeit non-criminal, behavior of friends or loved ones might not yet escalated to a threshold at which law enforcement intervention is legally justified. Furthermore, among the fundamental virtues of gatekeepers, toward violence prevention, is that helping professionals cannot be everywhere at all times, nor are there society-wide mechanisms tailored to identify all of the myriad problems for which gatekeeping could be applied (Williams et al., 2016a). Therefore, gatekeepers – which is to say, the public, in general – represent a network of those who can serve as ‘first responders’ with respect to helping those in need (Rickwood, Deane, Wilson, & Ciarrochi, 2005).

In the domain of violence prevention, another advantage of gatekeepers-as-first-responders, is that such an approach is ‘ideologically agnostic’ (Williams et al., 2016b). In other words, this piece of strategy can be brought to bear upon virtually any violence prevention context, including (for example) initiatives focused on reducing either gang-related violence, or terrorism and other ideologically-motivated crimes (i.e. hate crimes, or so-called violent extremism; Williams et al., 2016b). The systematic objectives, then, are to cultivate the public’s sensitivity toward recognizing a given problem, and to make the public both aware of available services to address the problem and sufficiently uninhibited with respect to accessing those services (Williams et al., 2016b).

Indeed, call-centers, dedicated to providing such services, to countering or preventing ideologically-motivated violence, have been established in several countries (Aly, 2017; Bélanger, 2017; Koehler, 2017a) and have recently begun in the United States (Malone, 2017; Williams, Bélanger, Horgan, & Evans, 2018) Such call-centers serve to provide callers with information and referrals regarding how to prevent someone (typically a third party, e.g. a friend or loved one) from maintaining a path that callers fear might lead to the commission of ideologically-motivated violence (Koehler, 2017a; Thomas, Grossman, Miah, & Christmann, 2017; Williams et al., 2018). However, research has borne out the intuitively-reasonable finding that individuals tend to be reluctant to reach out, in such cases, to law enforcement agencies: for fear of getting their friends, loved ones, and/or themselves scrutinized by, or ‘in trouble with,’ law enforcement or intelligence agencies (Williams et al., 2016a). For this, and all of the aforementioned reasons, it is important to understand both the facilitators and inhibitors of gatekeeper intervention, or what has been termed ‘vicarious help-seeking:’ the intent to help others who appear in need of help, but who are not actively seeking help (Williams et al., 2016a, 2016b). Prior to the initial development of the theory of vicarious help-seeking, in 2016 (Williams et al., 2016b), this was an unexplored area of theory relative to help-seeking (Rickwood et al., 2005).

Bystander intervention model. Predating the theory of vicarious help-seeking is the Bystander Intervention model (Darley & Latané, 1968), which posited five cognitive stages between an emergency and an individual’s decision to intervene via direct assistance. Those stages, depicted in Figure 1, are the following: (a) noticing the event, (b) interpreting the event as an emergency, (c) assuming responsibility for providing help, (d) knowing appropriate forms of assistance, and (e) implement a decision to help.

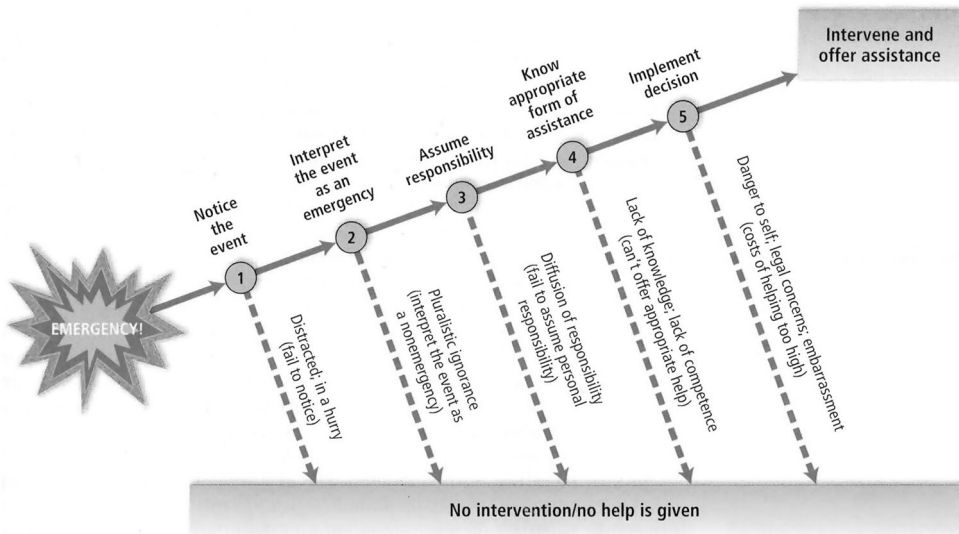


Figure 1. Stages of Bystander Intervention (adapted from Latané and Darley (1968), as cited in Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, (2007)).

That model has enjoyed widespread acceptance; however, it also is insufficient when applied to intervention in violence prevention contexts. Specifically, the bystander intervention model was developed to pertain to in-person, immediate emergencies. Therefore, its applicability is unknown in contexts where the emergency (i.e. others' cognitive and behavioral shifts toward violence) may develop relatively slowly (Williams et al., 2016b). Furthermore, it assumes that the person in need of assistance would welcome the help. Additionally, it fails to take into account both the relationship that bystanders have with persons in need of help, and norms pertinent to helping such persons (including norms, based on the type of relationship one has to the person in need). Consequently, it is prudent – both theoretically and practically – to specify the conditions that tend to affect individuals' willingness to intervene with friends in violence prevention contexts.

The theory of vicarious help-seeking addresses those gaps, and holds the following five tenets. (The fifth tenet is introduced for the first time here, i.e. in Part 1).

Tenet 1: Individuals' degree of fear of intervening with a friend (in violence prevention contexts) tends to be proportional to how much they care about damaging their relationship with that friend.

Rationale: Naturally, if one cares very little about a given relationship, one would have commensurately little compunction about intervening with such a person, given that – from a cost-benefit perspective – one would have relatively little to lose by damaging that relationship via intervention (Williams et al., 2016b). This tenet implies that individuals are aware that such intervention might be unwelcome to the friend of concern and/or that such intervention might carry unwanted repercussions for that friend (Williams et al., 2016a).

Tenet 2: Building upon Tenet 1, Tenet 2 posits a behavioral outcome (gatekeepers' intent to intervene), based upon their level of fear of harming their relationship with their friend). Specifically, the likelihood of individuals trying to get a friend to talk to a

third party (e.g. a counselor), to dissuade that friend from violence, tends to vary by individuals' severity of fear of damaging their relationship with that friend: in a curvilinear (U-shaped) function.

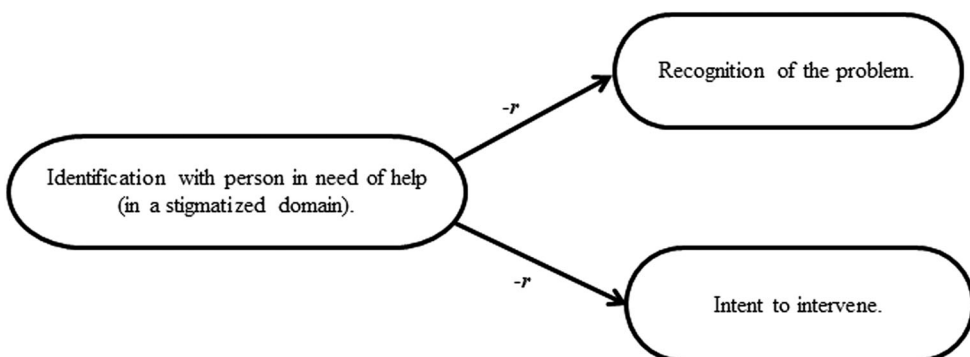
Rationale: If a threat posed by a friend is perceived as less severe/imminent, then gatekeepers' fear would tend to be commensurately less acute; hence, their felt need to intervene would also be less acute (Williams et al., 2016b). Conversely, those with a great amount of fear might feel that way if they perceive the threat as especially acute/imminent: hence, requiring action on the part of gatekeepers (Williams et al., 2016b). Therefore, one would expect a graph of this outcome (i.e. likelihood of action based on individuals' degree of fear) to resemble a 'U' shape (a so-called curvilinear or quadratic effect; Williams et al., 2016b).

Tenet 3: Individuals tend to be less likely to recognize illegal, potentially violent activities of friends with whom they closely identify. (See Figure 2.)

Rationale: Those who closely identify with one another tend to bask in each other's accomplishments (so-called 'reflected glory'), and – likewise – share in their sorrows and shame (Cialdini et al., 1976). Individuals also tend to have a strong motivation to perceive themselves as good by achieving a sense of value or self-esteem within the cultural context (Rosenblatt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Lyon, 1989; Steele, 1988, 2011). Therefore, insofar as the commission of violence carries a social stigma, friends who closely identify with each other tend to 'turn a blind eye' toward each other's problematic behaviors (Williams et al., 2016a, 2016b). Doing so serves the function of buffering one from sharing in a sense of shame at a close friend's stigmatized behavior (Williams et al., 2016b).

Tenet 4: Individuals tend to be less likely to try to get a friend to talk to a third party (e.g. a counselor), to dissuade that friend from violence, if they closely identify with that friend. (See Figure 2.)

Rationale: As displayed in Figure 2, one of the outcomes of closely identifying with a friend is not only the aforementioned (Tenet 3) recognition of problem behaviors,



-r = negative correlation, negative association, inversely proportional association.

+r = positive correlation, positive association, proportional association.

Figure 2. Intent to Intervene, and Recognition of the Problem, as a Negatively Correlated Function of Friends' identification With That Friend (In a Stigmatized Domain).

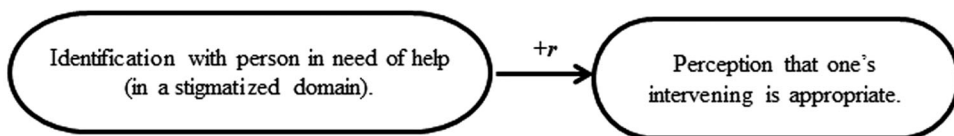
but – even if a problem is recognized – that that one would be less likely to intervene via trying to get that friend to speak with a third-party about the problem behavior (Williams et al., 2016b, 2016b). Per the aforementioned tenet 1, this seems likely due to fear that, in so doing, one might harm one’s relationship with the friend (Williams et al., 2016a, 2016b). Additionally, though not necessarily unrelated, is the fear that, by speaking with a third-party, the friend might run an elevated risk of getting into trouble with authorities (e.g. that the third party might notify authorities; Williams et al., 2016a, 2016b).

Tenet 5: Individuals tend to be more likely to perceive that trying to get a friend to talk to a third party (e.g. a counselor), to dissuade that friend from violence, is appropriate, if they closely identify with that person. (See Figure 3.)

Rationale: Ironically, given tenet 4, the basis of tenet five is that – despite a reduced likelihood of intervening (via trying to get a friend to speak with a third-party) – closely identified friends would see it as relatively appropriate for themselves to do so. The authors speculate, and (by virtue of the present study) sought to test, that such an attitude seems likely to stem from a positive association with one’s degree of identification with a friend. In other words, given a relatively higher sense of identification with a friend, one would feel a relatively higher sense of duty or prerogative to intervene for the good of that friend. Such an attitude reflects, in essence, an answer to the question: *If not I* – one who feels close to this person, and who holds their interests at heart – *who else* would step in to help my friend?

Overview

The present set of studies demonstrated both a replication of tenets one through four, and (per tenet 5) expansion of the theory (see Part 1). Regarding the replication featured in Part 1, if terrorism studies is to be a scientific discipline, then that requires its findings be subject to replication: the very cornerstone of science. Part 2 builds upon the theory of vicarious help-seeking by examining how – if gatekeepers are indeed willing to intervene – they would prefer to intervene in a violence prevention context: their natural inclinations with respect to doing so. Conversely, Part 3 asks – if gatekeepers are indeed willing to intervene – what are the main reasons preventing gatekeepers from reaching out to a third-party for assistance. Finally, Part 4 further extends that line of questioning to ask: who might be the most influential/effective at dissuading someone from committing terrorism (or joining or helping a group that commits such crimes). Given limitations of both



-r = negative correlation, negative association, inversely proportional association.

+r = positive correlation, positive association, proportional association.

Figure 3. Perceived Appropriateness of Intervening, Based on One’s Level of Identification With Prospective Help-Recipients (in a Stigmatized Domain).

time and funding, the answer to that important question could help to inform where such resources should be focused to reach, and to train, those who might be most effective at that important endeavor.

Part 1

Previous research has found that the predominant reason underlying prospective gatekeepers' reluctance to involve third parties, with respect to violence prevention, is fear of potential repercussions for such actions: a fear that generalized not only to a reluctance to contact law enforcement, but to certain others who, potentially, could be of help (i.e. family members or religious officials; Williams et al., 2016b). Specifically, individuals' reluctance to involve third parties, to help prevent their friends or family members from committing violence, appears to be associated with their degree of fear that doing so might damage their relationship with the person of concern (Williams et al., 2016b, 2016a). Furthermore, there is evidence that individuals' degree of personal identification with friends tends to impact negatively both their ability to recognize potential violence in the making, and their willingness to intervene (Williams et al., 2016b, 2016a).¹ The above findings are the basis of the first four tents of the theory of vicarious help-seeking.

The following study experimentally retested the above assertions, though – in contrast to previous research – with a sample intended to represent the general U.S. population (see 'Participants' subsection). Additionally, Part 1 expands the theory to include a test of norms pertinent to helping such persons. Specifically, it tested norms based on the closeness of the relationship that gatekeepers have with the person in need, with respect to gatekeepers' perceptions of how appropriate it would be for them to intervene.

Method

Research design. Part 1 employed a 2 (caring 'a lot' vs. 'only a little' about a relationship with a friend) x 2 (personal identification with a friend who is 'like' vs. 'not at all like' an extension of one's self) between-participants experimental design.

Sample size, power, and precision. To detect small effect sizes ($f = .10$), with conventional power (80%), at the conventional alpha-error probability (5%), given 4 conditions (per the research design), the total estimated sample size (to detect all main effects and interactions) equals 787 (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009).

Research by Oppenheimer, Meyvis, and Davidenko (2009), has identified that between 35% and 45% of participants tend to respond inattentively on laboratory-based computer administered surveys. Therefore, given that the present study was administered not only by computer, but online, and with anonymous participants, even more inattentive responding was expected. Consequently, the aforementioned sample size estimate was doubled to recruit no fewer than 1574 participants. This is in keeping with findings that inattentive respondents provide data of poorer quality, sufficient to obscure tests based upon the generalized linear model (such as the present study), including effects of experimental manipulations (Maniaci & Rogge, 2014). In short, this recruitment strategy was congruent with research that has found, when participants fail to follow instructions,

'noise' in the data tends to increase, and the data's validity tends to decrease (Oppenheimer et al., 2009). Indeed, of the obtained sample ($N = 1733$) 34% were excluded for failing two or more of the survey's three embedded inattentive-responding checks (Maniaci & Rogge, 2014) and/or were outliers with respect to time spent completing the survey, resulting in a final sample of 1151.

Sensitivity power analysis. A sensitivity power analysis is a calculation of the minimum effect size that could be detected at a given power level. Given the aforementioned achieved sample size ($n = 1151$), the minimum effect size that could be detected in this part of the study was $\rho = 0.08$: a small effect size, by statistical conventions, indicating that the study was amply powered to detect small effects.

Participants. Participants were recruited through TurkPrime, compensated with \$2 for completing the survey, and were selected to be proportionally representative of the adult U.S. population with respect to age, sex, and ethnicity (i.e. American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Black or African American, Latino, and White). The final sample represented the adult U.S. population to the following extent.

Sex. It was slightly, though significantly, more female (i.e. 55% vs. an expected 50.8%; $\chi^2 [1, N = 1151] = 4.19, p = .04$).

Age. Age groups were categorized as 18–29 ($n = 208$), 30–39 ($n = 168$), 40–49 ($n = 187$), 50–59 ($n = 231$), 60–69 ($n = 192$), and 70–99 ($n = 165$). No given age group significantly differed between observed vs. expected frequencies $\chi^2(5, N = 1151) = 2.26, p = .81$. Those observed vs. expected frequencies, by age group, are displayed in Table 1.

Ethnicity. With one exception, the sample's ethnicities did not significantly differ from U.S. census data. Specifically, the sample obtained 2.38 times fewer Latinos ($n = 78$) than expected ($n = 184$) $\chi^2(2, N = 1038) = 33.41, p < .001$.

Measures and covariates. The measures and covariates used in the present study are among the survey items featured in Appendix A (i.e. the survey that encompasses the present studies, and will be described in greater detail in the forthcoming 'procedure' section). Those measures were of three kinds. First, were seven-point Likert-type items to replicate, and expand upon, findings germane to the theory of vicarious help-seeking, which measured (with respect to intervening with a friend, in a violence-prevention context) (a) fear of harming one's relationship to that friend, (b) likelihood that one would try to get that friend to talk to a counselor, (c) certainty that one would need before trying to get that friend to talk to a counselor, and (d) appropriateness of trying to get that friend to talk to a counselor (Williams et al., 2016b, 2016a). Second, were demographic items regarding age, sex, and ethnicity. Third, were three inattentive responding checks, from Maniaci and Rogge (2014), spaced approximately at the interquartiles of the survey items encompassed by the present studies 1–3.

Table 1. Observed vs. Expected Frequencies by Age Range.

Ages	Observed frequencies	Expected frequencies
18–29	208	253
30–39	168	196
40–49	187	184
50–59	231	207
60–69	192	161
70–99	165	150

Procedure

After reading and agreeing to the survey's consent form, participants proceeded to complete the survey items featured in Appendix A. Among those items were the two experimental components whereby participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions for each of the two following vignettes relative to vicarious help-seeking.

Vignette 1. In both conditions, participants were instructed 'Please imagine an illegal act that one of your peers might do, that could end up injuring other people. When you have that illegal act in mind, please click "next."' Next, participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions, to vary the extent to which they care about their relationship to a friend in need of help, by reading the following: 'Now, please think of a relationship you have with a friend where you care [*Condition 1* "a lot" vs. *Condition 2* "only a little,"] about that relationship. When you have that relationship in mind, please click "next.'" This manipulation was intended to vary the first factor posited by the theory of vicarious help-seeking (degree of caring about a relationship).

Then, participants were instructed

Now, if you can, imagine that the person you have in mind was planning to do the illegal act that you have in mind. If you tried to get that person to talk to a counselor about doing that thing, how would you feel about whether doing so might harm your relationship with that person?

Responses (on a seven-point scale) ranged from 'Very unafraid' to 'Very afraid.' Answers to this question were intended to measure the first effect posited by the theory of vicarious help-seeking (fear of harming one's relationship to a friend of concern).

The next question asked participants 'How likely is it that you would try to get that person to talk to a counselor about doing that thing?' Responses (on a seven-point scale), ranged from 'Very unlikely' to 'Very likely.' Answers to this question were intended to measure the second effect posited by the theory of vicarious help-seeking (likelihood of intervention, as a function of fear of harming one's relationship to a friend of concern).

The framing of the above (and the following) vignette, in terms of a relatively narrow gatekeeping behavior (i.e. trying to get a friend to talk to a counselor) was done to enhance the so-called transportability of the scenarios: the extent to which individuals are able to imagine themselves within a given scenario. This was done to enhance both the psychological realism of those scenarios, and participants' engagement with them (Green, 2004), given that activation of the underlying psychological processes was of paramount importance for these experimental tests of the theory of vicarious help-seeking.

Vignette 2. As mentioned, the theory of vicarious help-seeking also posits that individuals' degree of personal identification with persons of concern will decrease both their recognition of a potential threat (posed by the person of concern), and their willingness to intervene, as depicted in Figure 2. To test these factors, participants were instructed, 'For this question, please keep in mind the previous illegal act, that one of your peers might do, that could end up injuring other people. When you have that illegal act in mind, please click "next."' Next, participants were randomly assigned to one of the two following conditions, to vary the extent to which they identified with a given friend, by reading the following.

Now, please think of a friend whom you feel is [*Condition 1* 'like an extension of yourself' vs. *Condition 2* 'not at all like an extension of yourself']. For example, when they succeed at something, [*Condition 1* 'it reflects well on you']; [*Condition 2*, 'it does not reflect on you,'] likewise, if they do something shameful [*Condition 1* 'it reflects poorly on you']; [*Condition 2*, 'it does not reflect on you,']. When you have that person in mind, please click 'next.'

This manipulation was intended to vary the second factor posited by the theory of vicarious help-seeking (degree of identification with a friend), as depicted in [Figure 2](#).

The vignette continued,

Now, imagine that the person you have in mind said, or did, something that hinted they might be planning to do the illegal act that you have in mind. How confident would you have to be, before trying to get that person to talk to a counselor about doing that thing?

Responses (on a seven-point scale), ranged from 'Very Unconfident' to 'Very Confident.' Answers to this question were intended to measure the third effect posited by the theory of vicarious help-seeking (recognition of a potential violent threat), as depicted in [Figure 2](#).

Participants also were asked, 'How likely is it that you would try to get that person to talk to a counselor about doing that thing?' Responses (on a seven-point scale), ranged from 'Very Unlikely' to 'Very Likely.' Answers to this question were intended to measure the fourth effect posited by the theory of vicarious help-seeking (likelihood of intervention, as a function of one's personal identification with a friend of concern), as depicted in [Figure 2](#).

New extension of the theory of vicarious help-seeking. To test the new/fifth extension of the theory of vicarious help-seeking (i.e. regarding norms pertinent to interpersonal relationships), participants were asked, 'How appropriate or inappropriate is it for you to try to get that person to talk to a counselor about doing that thing?' Responses (on a seven-point scale), ranged from 'Very Inappropriate' to 'Very Appropriate.' Answers to this question were intended to measure the fifth/final effect posited by the theory of vicarious help-seeking (perceived appropriateness of intervening, as a function of one's personal identification with a friend of concern), as depicted in [Figure 3](#).

Results

Vignette 1: The first component of the theory of vicarious help-seeking. As predicted, the first effect – that individuals' fear of damaging their relationship to a prospective

help-recipient tends to increase relative to how much individuals cared about that relationship – was statistically significant $F(1, 1149) = 58.92, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .05$: depicted in [Figure 4](#). Additionally, this finding held strongly among the subsample of adults under age 24, $F(1, 84) = 12.65, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .13$.

Vignette 1: The second component of the theory of vicarious help-seeking. As predicted, the second effect – that the likelihood of individuals trying to get a friend to talk to a counselor, tends to vary by individuals' degree of fear of damaging their relationship with the friend (in a curvilinear [U-shaped] function) – was supported. Specifically, the linear effect of such fear on individuals' likelihood of intervening was statistically insignificant, $F(1, 1149) = .16, p = .69$, and similarly so among adults under age 24, $F(1, 84) = .74, p = .39$. Whereas, as predicted, the curvilinear (U-shaped) function was statistically

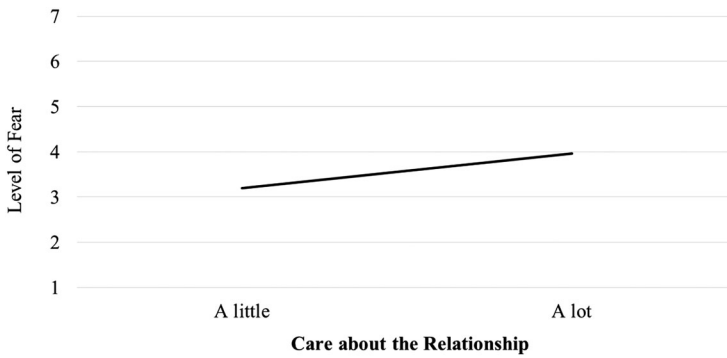


Figure 4. Individuals' Fear of Damaging Their Relationship to a Prospective Help-Recipient, Based on Their Degree of Care about Their Relationship to That Person.

significant, $F(1, 1148) = 13.53, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .01$: depicted in Figure 5. Furthermore, the curvilinear effect held among adults under age 24, $F(1, 83) = 9.47, p = .003 = .10, \eta_p^2 = .10$.

Vignette 2: The third component of the theory of vicarious help-seeking. As predicted, the third effect of the theory of vicarious help-seeking – that individuals tend to be less likely to recognize illegal, potentially-injurious activities of friends with whom they closely identify – was statistically significant, $F(1, 1149) = 7.07, p = .008, \eta_p^2 = .01$: depicted in Figure 6. Although, this small effect's trend was similar among adults under age 24, it was statistically insignificant in the analyses of that subsample, $F(1, 84) = 2.14, p = .15$.

Vignette 2: The fourth component of the theory of vicarious help-seeking. Though statistically significant – that when peers recognize illegal and potentially injurious activities of friends with whom they closely identify, they tend to be less willing to intervene – the fourth effect of the theory of vicarious help-seeking was contradicted. Indeed, the data demonstrated that when peers recognize illegal and potentially injurious activities of friends with whom they closely identify, they tend to be *more* willing to intervene, $F(1, 1148) = 42.48, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .04$: depicted in Figure 7. Furthermore, this effect held among adults under age 24, $F(1, 83) = 13.00, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .14$.

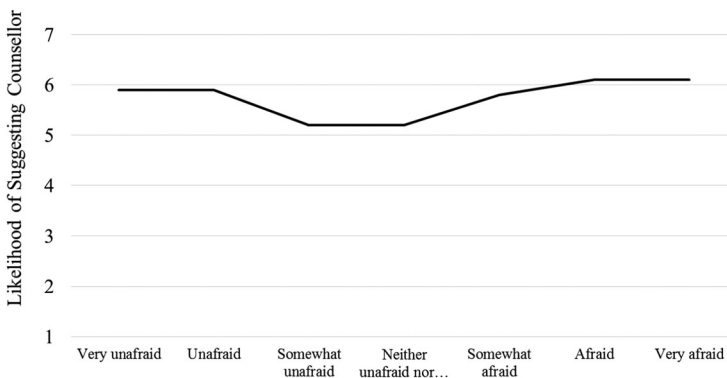


Figure 5. The Curvilinear Effect of Individuals' Degree of Fear of Damaging Their Relationship With a Friend, On Their Willingness to Intervene With That Friend.

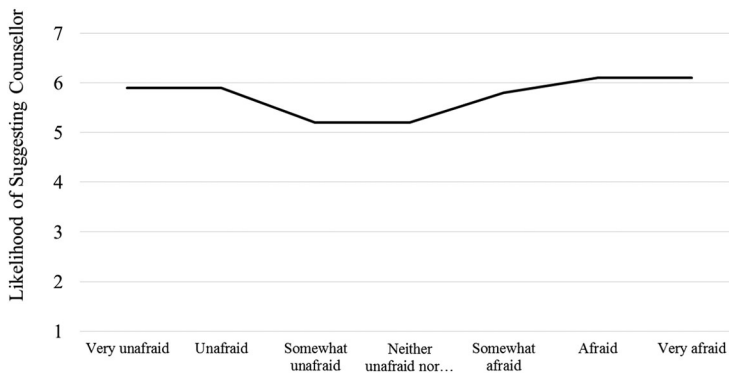


Figure 6. Individuals' Recognition of a Potential Violent Threat (Posed by a Friend), Based on Their Level of Personal Identification With That Friend.

The fifth component (and new extension) of the theory of vicarious help-seeking.

Finally, as predicted, the fifth effect of the theory of vicarious help-seeking – that the perceived 'appropriateness' of intervening with a friend (who is hinting that they might be planning to commit an illegal act that is potentially injurious to others), tends to vary by individuals' degree of identification with that friend – was statistically significant $F(1, 1149) = 46.40, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .04$: as depicted in Figure 8. Additionally, this effect held among adults under age 24, $F(1, 84) = 6.04, p = .016, \eta_p^2 = .07$.

Discussion

Part 1 represents the first replication of the four original tenets of the theory of vicarious help-seeking, though – in contrast to previous research – the present tests involved a sample intended to represent the general U.S. population (Williams et al., 2016a). It also represents the first demonstration of the fifth tenet of the theory of vicarious help-seeking, regarding norms pertinent to helping friends of concern, based on the type of relationship one has to such friends. Regarding the test of the first tenet, it is relatively

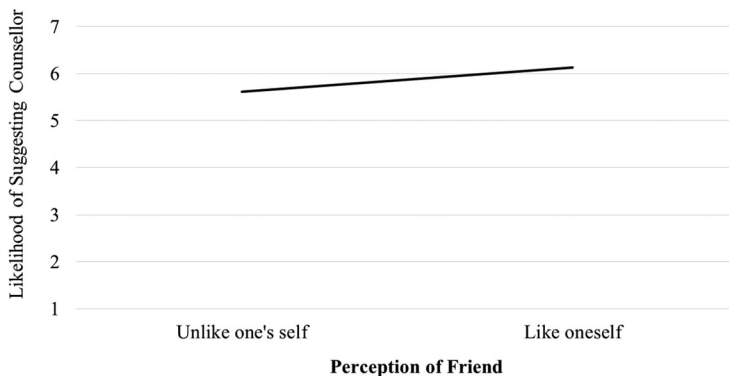


Figure 7. Individuals' Likelihood of Intervening With a Friend, Based on Their Identification With That Friend.

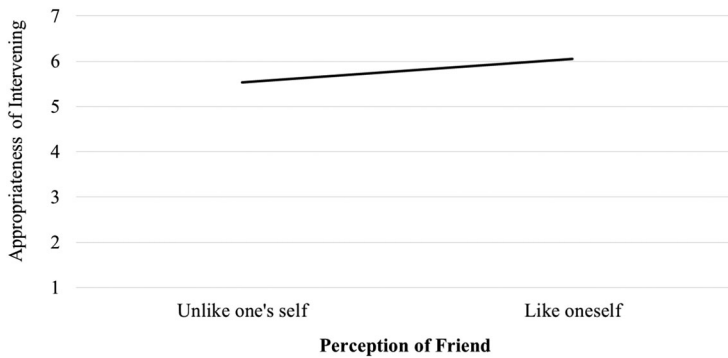


Figure 8. Perceived Appropriateness of Intervening With a Friend, Based on One’s Level of Identification With That Friend.

unsurprising that – as predicted – individuals’ degree of fear of intervening with a friend (in violence prevention contexts) tends to be proportional to how much they care about damaging their relationship with that friend. As mentioned, if one cares very little about a given relationship, one would have commensurately little compunction about intervening with that person, given that there would be relatively little to lose by risking damage to that relationship. Again, this tenet implies that individuals are at least implicitly aware that intervention, in violence prevention contexts, might be unwelcome by the friend of concern and/or that such intervention might carry unwanted repercussions for that friend.

Regarding the theory’s second tenet (that the likelihood of individuals trying to get a friend to talk to a third party, to dissuade that friend from violence, tends to vary by individuals’ degree of fear of damaging their relationship with that friend: in a curvilinear [U-shaped] function), the support found for this tenet is encouraging for the prospect of bystander intervention in violence prevention contexts. It suggests that – despite high degrees of fear at the prospect of intervening in a violence prevention context – friends, nevertheless, seem willing to intervene (Williams et al., 2016a). This suggests that, although friends might not intervene until a problem becomes relatively acute/urgent, they will tend to step up to the challenge posed by intervening. Furthermore, this finding bodes well for the success of gatekeeper training programs: that friends represent willing (albeit, perhaps, initially reluctant) partners in violence prevention interventions.

Regarding the test of the theory’s third tenet (that individuals tend to be less likely to recognize illegal, potentially violent activities of friends with whom they closely identify), it is somewhat troubling that this effect was supported. In short, it seems that closely identified friends tend to turn a blind eye toward illegal, potentially violent behavior of their friends. Fortunately, this effect, though statistically significant, was relatively small, suggesting that this effect could be ameliorated via appropriate gatekeeper training. Specifically, part of such training could include raising awareness among prospective gatekeepers about of their evaluative ‘blind spot,’ with respect to assessment of their friends’ behaviors.

Regarding the test of the theory’s fourth tenet (that individuals tend to be less likely to try get a friend to talk to a third party, to dissuade that friend from violence, if they closely

identify with that friend), although the statistically-significant results of that test ran counter to predictions, that is excellent news for the prospect of friends-as-gatekeepers. In short, it bodes well for the cause of violence prevention that, when individuals recognize illegal and potentially injurious activities of their friends with whom they closely identify, they tend to be more – not less – willing to intervene.

Regarding the support found for the theory's fifth tenet (that individuals tend to be more likely to perceive that trying to get a friend to talk to a third party, to dissuade that friend from violence, is appropriate, if they closely identify with that person), again that is good news for the prospect of friends-as-gatekeepers: one that compliments the findings related to the theory's fourth tenet. In sum, it seems that not only are individuals willing to try get their friends to talk to a third party (to dissuade such friend from violence), but that they perceive it as relatively appropriate for them to do so: representing a factor (close identification with a given friend) that can be considered a facilitator of friends' intent to intervene (Ajzen, 1985, 1991; Netemeyer, Van Ryn, & Ajzen, 1991).

Part 2

Given the encouraging findings of Part 1, with respect to friends' willingness to intervene in violence prevention contexts, this begs the question: by what means are prospective gatekeepers most inclined to intervene? At least one important reason for the answer to that question is that it would offer insight into how to prompt gatekeeping behavior via capitalizing upon gatekeepers' natural inclinations toward intervention (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). Therefore, Part 2 examined how gatekeepers would prefer to intervene in a violence prevention context.

Method

Research design. The study employed a six-level (intervention modes) within-participants design.

Sample size, power, and precision. The sample size estimate was calculated to detect a small effect size ($f = .10$), with conventional power (80%), at the conventional alpha-error probability (5%), given 6 levels (per the research design). Additionally, it was calculated assuming zero correlation (the most conservative estimate) between measurements, and correcting for nonsphericity (according to results from previous research; Williams et al., 2016a), by a factor of 0.98, according to the Greenhouse-Geisser method (the more conservative correction vs. the Huynh-Feldt method), equaling a sample size of not less than 219 (Faul et al., 2009). Of course, the present study's final sample of 1151 amply satisfied that requirement.

Sensitivity power analysis. Again, given the achieved sample size ($n = 1151$), the minimum effect size that could be detected in this part of the study was $\rho = 0.08$: a small effect size, by statistical conventions, indicating that the study was amply powered to detect small effects.

Measures and covariates. The measures and covariates used in the present study are among the survey items featured in Appendix A. As mentioned, that survey encompasses the present study, and will be described in greater detail in the forthcoming 'procedure' section. In brief, it measured what (if anything) individuals would say or do in response

to a friend who was considering committing violence against someone else. Additionally, it measured individuals' ranked preferences of those responses.

Procedure

Participants were asked,

Thinking now about your friends, imagine if one of them started to say or do things that made you think they were thinking about committing violence against someone else. What (if anything) do you think you would say or do in response to that friend? Please select all that apply.

Response options were: (a) I would ask them what they're thinking, (b) I would give them advice, (c) I would talk to another friend or family member about what to do, (d) I would talk to someone I trust, outside of my friends and family (e.g. a religious official, or a counselor) about what to do, (e) I would try to get my friend to talk to a counselor, (f) I would contact the police, and (g) Other, (please specify).

Those response items were selected from previous research that distilled the most-common gatekeeper responses to the aforementioned scenario: according to that study's sample, which included both youth and adults from Los Angeles and greater Washington, DC (see Williams et al., 2016b). As such, those response items are a concise, empirically-derived set of gatekeeper inclinations with respect to intervention modalities.

Next, participants were instructed

Imagining the same friend (from the previous question), please rank each of these possible options, according to how much you would prefer to do them. Drag the options to put them in your preferred order: your most preferred item at the top.

Results

Figure 9 displays the responses to the previous question: namely, rankings of intervention modalities, regarding participants' inclinations toward intervening with a friend in the aforementioned violence prevention context. As readily observable from the categories' error bars, each item's ranking significantly differed from the others (confidence interval = 95%, $\alpha = .05$). The response option 'Other, (please specify),' was selected by only 5.5% of the sample. Upon inspection of those 'other' responses, only .003% of the sample mentioned responses that arguably could fall outside of the reasons displayed in Figure 9. Given such a small percentage, those reasons will not be discussed.

Discussion

There are (at least) four important findings displayed in Figure 9, including their parallels with previous research (Williams et al., 2016a; displayed in Figure 10). First, it is notable that the top-two (i.e. most preferred) responses are the same in both Figures 9 and 10: specifically, that the present research replicates previous findings (more on the implication of such replication to follow). Furthermore, the two most-preferred intervention types – "Ask what they're thinking," and 'Give advice,' could be considered 'direct engagement' between gatekeepers and the friend of concern. Upon first consideration, the likelihood

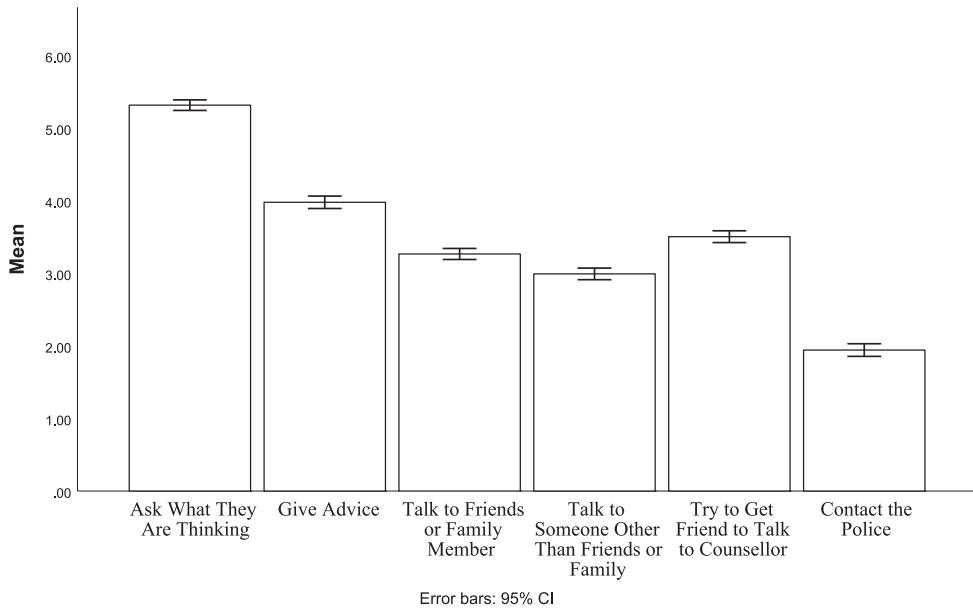


Figure 9. Mean Rankings of Intervention Modalities, Regarding Participants’ Preferred Means of Intervening With a Friend in a Violence Prevention Context. (Lower numbers represent less-preferred.)

of such direct engagement might seem somewhat surprising, given that they entail an individual communicating directly with a friend about a stigmatized behavior (i.e. that friend’s intention to committing violence against someone else; Williams et al., 2016a).

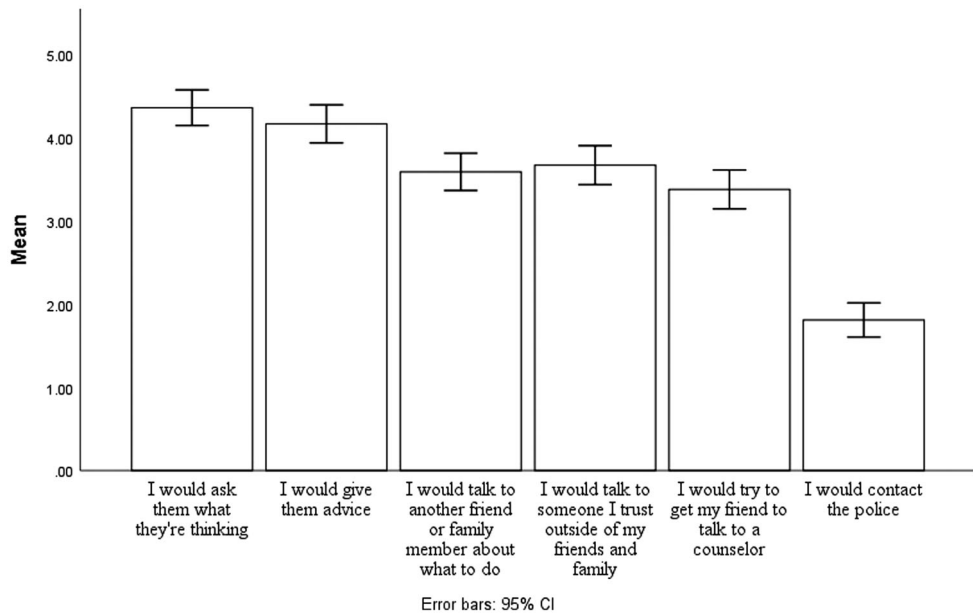


Figure 10. Mean Rankings of Intervention Modalities, Regarding Participants’ Preferred Means of Intervening With a Friend in a Violence Prevention Context (Lower numbers represent less-preferred; Williams et al., 2016a).

However, given that these two intervention types can be performed without involving third-parties, they also preserve the confidentiality of both the friend of concern and the gatekeeper. Therefore, such intervention modalities are advantageous for gatekeepers: both toward maintaining interpersonal trust inherent to friendships, and toward reducing gatekeepers' fears related to prospective repercussions of involving third-parties (Williams et al., 2016a).

This finding also bodes well with respect to the prospect of gatekeeper intervention training. It suggests not only that friends – those who might be best positioned to intervene as 'first responders' (Rickwood et al., 2005; Williams et al., 2016b) – tend to prefer to intervene with their friends directly, but that such a preference is also the swiftest, most readily-available means of intervention (Williams et al., 2016a). Consequently, it also suggests that such gatekeeper training programs ought to leverage this inclination, by training individuals how to engage directly with their friends (Williams et al., 2016a). For example, such training – transmitted, for example, through high schools and Universities – could include opportunities for individuals to practice/roleplay such intervention: providing trainees with the chance to develop a 'verbal script' (i.e. language) that feels authentic to them (Williams et al., 2016a).

The second notable attribute of Figures 9 and 10, is that – in comparison to the two most-preferred intervention types – the next three most-preferred types involve a third party (which also was found in previous research; Williams et al., 2016a): namely, the involvement of 'another friend or family member,' 'someone I trust outside of my friends and family,' and/or 'a counselor.' As mentioned, involving a third party poses a potential breach of confidentiality, and – as such – represent a threat both to maintaining a friendship's interpersonal trust and to reducing gatekeepers' fears related to prospective repercussions of involving third-parties (Williams et al., 2016a). These three intervention types – involving a trusted (albeit non-law enforcement) third-party – represent a second method of intervention on which peer gatekeepers arguably should be trained: when and how to involve such third-parties (Williams et al., 2016a).

The third notable attribute of Figures 9 and 10, is that the least-preferred mode of intervention is to contact the police. This is unsurprising insofar as the repercussions for doing so – for the person of concern and/or the gatekeeper – might seem most grave to gatekeepers. Nevertheless, although this intervention type was the least-preferred, that does not necessarily imply that such a means of intervention is unlikely. However, this unsurprising finding further supports the need for peer gatekeeper training: that expecting the public to report friends to law enforcement is asking the public to 'swim upstream' with respect to their natural inclinations regarding intervention in violence prevention contexts (Williams et al., 2016a).

The fourth notable attribute of Figure 9 has been echoed in the previous three findings: that each of those findings replicates previous research (Williams et al., 2016a). That suggests such findings are robust: that they are relatively trustworthy both in and of themselves, and with respect to their ability to generalize to other samples. Furthermore, with respect to generalizability, as mentioned, the present study's sample was drawn to represent the U.S. population: further strengthening the present findings' likelihood of replicating among other samples drawn from the general population of the United States. In short, the patterns displayed in Figure 9 appear to be relatively stable/reliable. Therefore, one may hypothesize, or plan (including the formulation of policies and/or programs),

based upon these findings, with relatively high confidence that such endeavors have a firm empirical footing.

Part 3

Whereas the previous study examined how gatekeepers would prefer to intervene in a violence prevention context, Part 3 examined reasons preventing gatekeepers from reaching out to a third-party for assistance. Previous research has examined responses to the following two question stems: introduced after instructing participants, 'Thinking now about your friends or family members, imagine if one of them started to say or do things that made you think they were thinking about committing violence against someone else' (Williams et al., 2016b). 'What would prevent you *from speaking with someone (e.g. an official from your religion, or another friend or family member) about your concerns?*' (emphasis in the original), and 'What would prevent you *from speaking with the police about your concerns?*' (emphasis in the original).

Extending that line of questioning, the present study sought to examine gatekeepers' concerns, about intervening in a violence-prevention context, by asking participants about the reasons they would not want to communicate, either by phone or text, with a professional counselor. That question is germane to understanding why gatekeepers might be reluctant to utilize non-law enforcement, violence-prevention call-centers that are intended to prevent ideologically-motivated violence (Williams et al., 2016b).

Method

Research design. The study employed a six-level (intervention modes) within-participants design.

Sample size, power, and precision. Given that Part 3 featured the same research design as Part 2, both its sample size, and the rationale behind its calculation, remain the same: estimated at not less than 219 participants (Faul et al., 2009). Therefore, the present study's final sample of 1151 amply satisfied that requirement.

Measures and covariates. The measures and covariates used in the present study are among the survey items featured in Appendix A. As mentioned, that survey encompasses the present studies, and will be described in greater detail in the forthcoming 'procedure' section. In brief, it measured the reasons why individuals would not want to communicate (by phone or text) with a professional counselor, regarding a friend who was considering committing violence against someone else.

Procedure

Following participants' response to the question posed in Part 2 ('Thinking now about your friends, imagine if one of them started to say or do things that made you think they were thinking about committing violence against someone else. What (if anything) do you think you would say or do in response to that friend? Please select all that apply. '), they were asked the question germane to this Study: 'Thinking about that same friend (from the previous question), what are the reasons why you would not want to communicate (by phone or text) with a professional counselor?'

Response options were: (a) I'd be concerned that I could be identified, (b) I'd be concerned that I could get my friend/family member in trouble, (c) I'd be concerned that I could get myself in trouble, (d) I can help them by myself, (e) I don't think it would help, (f) I don't have enough time, (g) Other reason, (please specify).

As with Part 2, those response items were selected from previous research that distilled the most-common gatekeeper responses to the aforementioned scenario: according to that study's sample (which included both youth and adults from Los Angeles and greater Washington, DC; see Williams et al., 2016b). As such, those response items are a concise, empirically-derived set of gatekeeper concerns with respect to intervening with a friend, in a violence-prevention context, via communicating (by phone or text) with a professional counselor.

Results

The aforementioned rankings are displayed in Figure 11. Observable from the categories' error bars, the most-endorsed reason was 'I'd be concerned that I could get my friend/family member in trouble,' followed by the three reasons which did not significantly differ from each other: 'I'd be concerned that I could be identified,' 'I'd be concerned that I could get myself in trouble,' and 'I don't think it would help.' The two least-endorsed options, which did not significantly differ from each other, were 'I can help them by myself,' and 'I don't have enough time.' Each item's ranking significantly differed from the others (confidence interval = 95% / $\alpha = .05$). All of the patterns displayed in Figure 11 were statistically equivalent between adults above or below age 24.

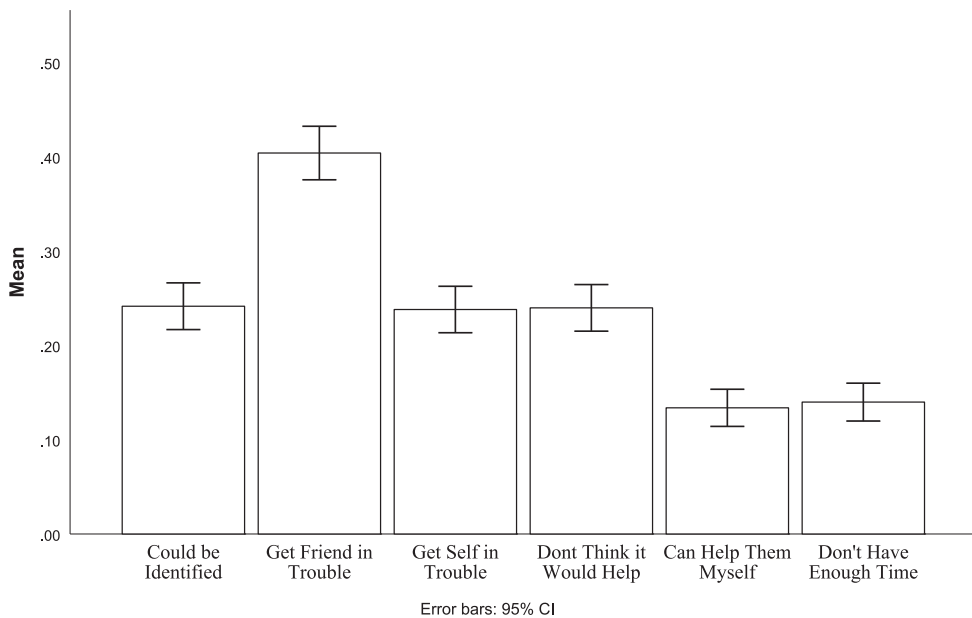


Figure 11. Percentages of Endorsed Response Options, in Response to the Question: 'What Are the Reasons Why You Would Not Want to Communicate (by Phone or Text) With a Professional Counselor?'

The response option 'Other, (please specify),' was selected by 17% of the sample. Upon inspection of those reasons, only 7% of the sample mentioned reasons that arguably could fall outside of the reasons displayed in [Figure 11](#). Given such a small percentage, those reasons will not be discussed in detail. Nevertheless, in the spirit of scientific transparency, those reasons revolved around the following two themes: norms of propriety (e.g. whether its one's 'business' to intervene in such a way, and instrumental fears (e.g. fear of retaliation). Regarding norms of propriety, an effect of such norms was addressed by the experimental test of the fifth tenet of the theory of vicarious help-seeking, in Part 1. Regarding instrumental fear, such a reason (e.g. fear of retaliation) is both self-evident and self-explanatory.

Discussion

Three of the four most-endorsed reasons why participants (i.e. prospective gatekeepers) would not want to communicate (by phone or text) with a professional counselor are unsurprising, given that they entail fear. However, the other of the four most-endorsed reasons, 'I don't think it would help' is potentially troubling, and a vital piece of information to be made known to those involved in managing and/or promoting violence-prevention call-centers. In short, the public seems to be relatively unaware, and/or skeptical, of the help that they – and, by extension, the friend of concern – could receive by utilizing such call-centers.

Furthermore, given that the reason 'I can help them by myself,' was endorsed by a significantly lower percentage (indeed, it was endorsed equivalently to the least-endorsed reason), it is not that participants believed, more so, that they could help a friend of concern by themselves: which, plausibly, would have reduced the degree to which they believed a counselor could be of additional assistance. Instead, the data suggest that prospective gatekeepers are not only afraid to contact counselors, but are both relatively skeptical of counselors' ability to help, and relatively unconfident about how to help a friend of concern by themselves. The irony is that it is especially because of their relatively low self-confidence that gatekeepers are especially in need of a counselor's advice regarding how they – as gatekeepers – may be of help to their friends.

However, a potentially promising implication of the finding that 'I can help them by myself' was endorsed at such a relatively low percentage is it suggests the public senses – if only implicitly, or inchoately – the need for an effective source of counseling, information, and/or referrals. Such a felt-need bodes well for violence-prevention counseling, information, and referral call-centers: if only they can effectively promote the effectiveness of their services. This highlights that such call-centers' promotional campaigns likely will struggle to convince a skeptical public of the effectiveness of their services, but that such convincing is critical for call-centers' success.

Another potentially promising finding is that the reason, 'Don't have enough time,' was endorsed least-often (statistically equivalent to 'I can help them by myself'). This suggests that other demands upon individuals' time, and/or implicit apathy, are not relatively pressing reasons underlying individuals' reluctance to access a violence-prevention counseling service. Therefore, it seems such a prospective barrier need not be among the primary foci of violence-prevention call-centers' promotional campaigns. (See the 'Implications' subsection, of the General Discussion section, for suggested means to enable gatekeepers

to overcome the aforementioned sources of reluctance with respect to communicating with a professional counselor.)

Part 4

Previous research has examined individuals' beliefs regarding those who might be the most well-positioned gatekeepers with respect to persons considering acts of violent extremism (Williams et al., 2016b). In that research, participants (which, as mentioned, included both youth and adults from Los Angeles and greater Washington, DC) were in consensus regarding their belief that those best-positioned to notice early signs of individuals considering acts of violent extremism likely would be such individuals' friends: perhaps more so than school counselors, clergy, or family members (Williams et al., 2016b).

Such consensus extended to the belief that friends could most effectively shepherd such individuals to violence-prevention service providers. Part 4 further examined that belief by asking not only who might be the most influential as such shepherds, but by asking (in essence) who else, besides friends, might be influential in that regard. In short, although friends might be the first to know of potential violence to be perpetrated by one of their friends, that does not imply they also would be the most effective at helping to remedy that problem. Therefore, it is important to examine who might be the most influential gatekeepers for violence prevention.

Method

Research design. The study employed a mixed within-between participants design entailing a 15-level (gatekeeper type) within-participants factor, by a two-level (parents vs. non-parents) between-participants factor.

Sample size, power, and precision. The sample size estimate was calculated to detect a small effect size ($f = .10$), with conventional power (80%), at the conventional alpha-error probability (5%), given 6 levels (per the research design). Additionally, it was calculated assuming zero correlation (the most conservative estimate) between measurements. Given the lack of previous research/guidance on the present topic, a correction for nonsphericity was neither assumed nor employed ($\epsilon = 1$). Therefore, the estimated a sample size was calculated to be not less than 124 (Faul et al., 2009). Again, the present study's final sample of 1151 amply satisfied that requirement.

Sensitivity power analysis. As before, given the achieved sample size ($n = 1151$), the minimum effect size that could be detected in this part of the study was $\rho = 0.08$: a small effect size, by statistical conventions, indicating that the study was amply powered to detect small effects.

Measures and covariates. The measures and covariates used in the present study are among the survey items featured in Appendix A. As mentioned, that survey encompasses the present studies, and will be described in greater detail in the following 'Procedure' section. In brief, it measured perceptions of how influential various gatekeepers would be with respect to dissuading an individual from committing a hate-crime or terrorism (or joining or helping a group that commits such crimes).

Procedure

Participants were asked,

If someone you know, who is about the same age as you, was considering committing a hate-crime or terrorism (or was considering joining or helping a group that commits such crimes), how influential do you think the following people would be for persuading that person not to do so?

Response options, on seven-point scales, ranging from ‘Very Uninfluential’ to ‘Very Influential,’ included the 15 types of prospective gatekeepers displayed in Figure 12. That list of prospective gatekeepers was derived from those posited in academic literature on terrorism and political violence, including qualitative research of the present study’s research team (see Koehler, 2017b; see Weine et al., 2009; see Williams et al., 2016b, 2016a).

Results

Figures 12 and 13 display participants’ perceptions of the degree of influence of 15 prospective gatekeepers (rated on seven-point scales). As displayed in Figure 12 the four types of gatekeepers rated most-influential by participants, age 18–23, were friends in-person (versus online friends), parents, other family members, and mentors. As displayed in Figure 13 the five types of gatekeepers rated most-influential by participants, age 24 and older, included the top-four of those age 18–24, with the addition of professional counselors / psychologists. Additionally, parents vs. non-parents did not significantly differ in their ratings of parents and other family members $F(1, 1149) = 2.77, p = .10$, and $F(1, 1148) = 1.01, p = .31$ respectively.

Discussion

Given that the four types of gatekeepers rated most-influential by participants, age 18–23, (i.e. friends in-person, parents, other family members, and mentors), were the same as

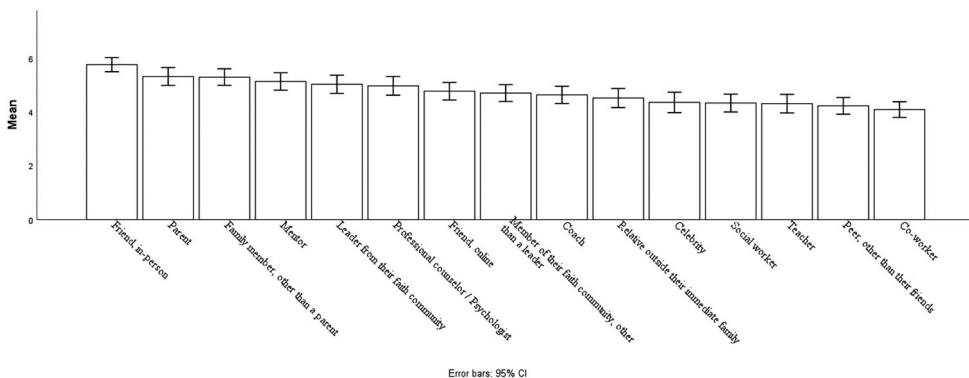


Figure 12. Ratings of Adults, Under Age 24, Regarding Their Perceptions of Prospective Gatekeepers’ Influence to Persuade a Peer Not to Commit a Hate-Crime, Terrorism, or Joining or Helping a Group That Commits Such Crimes.

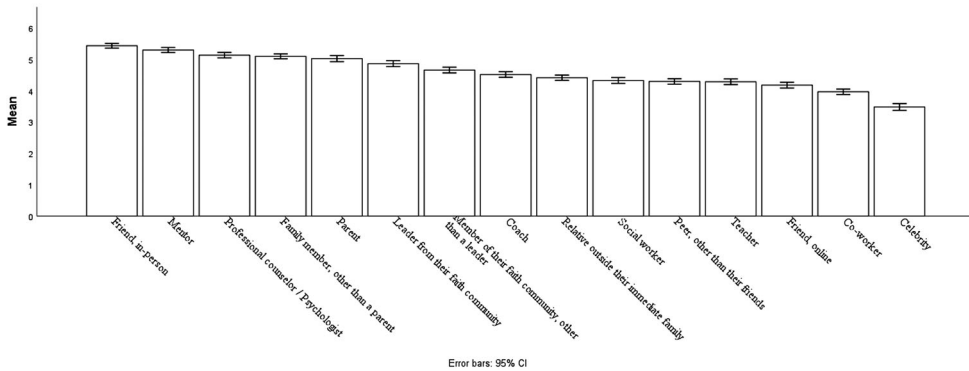


Figure 13. Ratings of Adults, Over Age 24, Regarding Their Perceptions of Prospective Gatekeepers' Influence to Persuade a Peer Not to Commit a Hate-Crime, Terrorism, or Joining or Helping a Group That Commits Such Crimes.

those among the five types of gatekeepers rated most-influential by those age 24 and older suggests consensus regarding the relative importance of those four types of gatekeepers for dissuading peers from committing hate-crimes, terrorism, or joining or helping groups that commit such crimes. That consensus, interpreted in conjunction with the size and representativeness of the sample, also suggests that finding is relatively stable/robust and – hence – likely to replicate with other samples drawn from the general U.S. population.

That adults, age 24 and older, also included professional counselors / psychologists among the five most-influential types of gatekeepers might reflect that they have had more experience in working with such professionals, and – therefore – recognize their potential influence. It also could reflect that adults under age 24 have had experience with such counselors but found them, on average, to be relatively uninfluential.

That parents vs. non-parents did not significantly differ on their ratings of how they rated parents and other family members suggests that neither parents, nor non-parents, held aggrandized beliefs regarding the influence of their own (parent vs. non-parent) group in the given context. Therefore, the inclusion of parents among the five most-influential types of gatekeepers (across both age groups: adults above vs. below age 24) does not appear to be an artifact of a 'parental status' bias in the data. That lends further support to the notion that the ratings of the five most-influential gatekeepers are likely stable/robust and replicable with other samples drawn from the general U.S. population.

General discussion

Recap of main findings

Part 1 demonstrated both a replication of the first four tenets of the theory of vicarious help-seeking, and expansion of the theory to include social norms. As predicted – participants' degree of fear of intervening with a friend tended to be proportional to how much they cared about damaging their relationship with that friend. Furthermore, the likelihood of participants trying to get a friend to talk to a third party, to dissuade that friend from

violence, tended to vary by their degree of fear of damaging their relationship with that friend: in a curvilinear [U-shaped] function).

Additionally, participants tended to be less likely to recognize illegal, potentially violent activities of friends with whom they closely identified. However, counter to predictions, participants tended to be more – not less – willing to intervene with friends with whom they closely identify. Finally, participants tended to be more likely to perceive that trying to get a friend to talk to a third party, to dissuade that friend from violence, is appropriate, if they closely identify with that person.

Part 2 examined how gatekeepers would prefer to intervene in a violence prevention context: their natural inclinations with respect to doing so. The two most-preferred intervention types could be considered ‘direct engagement:’ asking what a friend of concern is thinking, and/or giving them advice. A promising implication of that finding is that friends tend to prefer to intervene with their friends in a mode that can be swiftly employed, and that presumably is readily-available.

The next three most-preferred types involved a third party. Those preferences were to talk to another friend or family member, talk to someone that participants trust outside of their friends and family; and/or talk to a counselor. The least-preferred mode of intervention was to contact the police.

Part 3 examined reasons preventing gatekeepers from communicating (by phone or text) with a third-party (i.e. a professional counselor), regarding a friend who was considering committing violence against someone else. Three of the four most-endorsed reasons why participants would not want to communicate (by phone or text) with a professional counselor were unsurprising, given that they entail fear. Those three were fears that participants could get their friend in trouble, that participants could be identified, and/or that they could get themselves in trouble. The other of the four most-endorsed reasons, ‘I don’t think it would help’ suggests that the public are relatively unaware, and/or skeptical, of the help that they – and, by extension, the friend of concern – could receive by utilizing the counseling available through violence prevention call-centers. Additionally, participants were relatively unconfident about how to help a friend of concern by themselves.

Finally, Part 4 further examined who – besides friends – might be most influential/effective as gatekeepers. The four types of gatekeepers rated most-influential by participants, age 18–23, were friends in-person (versus online friends), parents, other family members, and mentors. The five types of gatekeepers rated most-influential by participants, age 24 and older, included the top-four of those age 18–24, with the addition of professional counselors / psychologists.

Limitations

The association between intent and behavior. Among the limitations of the foregoing studies, Part 1 (the tests of the theory of vicarious help-seeking) examined participants’ behavioral intentions, though intent does not determine behavior. Instead, attitudes, norms, and one’s sense of self-efficacy toward performing a given behavior are theorized to contribute to one’s intent to perform that behavior: which is a precursor – though not determinant – of action in accord with such intent (Ajzen, 1991; see Figure 14). Nevertheless, to study intent is to study the closest link in the causal chain from attitudes to behavior.

Given the low base rate of ideologically-motivated violence, it would have been infeasible to have attempted Part 1 through observational methods of participants' behaviors (i.e. observing gatekeepers in response to such 'real life' violence prevention crises). Nevertheless, Part 1 employed experimental methods: the most compelling research design with respect to demonstrating causality. Furthermore, all of the studies employed a sample drawn from the general U.S. population, stratified according to 2016 census data: further bolstering the confidence one may have in the findings.

Paradigm. Another limitation of the present studies is that, aside from the hypothetical nature of the scenarios, the outcomes participants were asked to envision – namely, getting a friend to speak with a counselor (Part 1), or personally contacting a counselor (Studies 2 and 3), represent a relatively narrow application of the theory of vicarious help-seeking. As mentioned, such a concrete, relatively narrow outcome of interest was employed to enhance the transportability of the scenarios: to enhance both the psychological realism of those scenarios, and participants' engagement with them. Nevertheless, the theory of vicarious help-seeking is posited to apply broadly to vicarious help-seeking situations in general. Therefore, it is believed that its tenets should apply, at least, to other situations in which gatekeepers are faced with the choice to help a friend by contacting a third-party who is potentially helpful albeit somewhat 'risky' with respect to confiding in them (e.g. risking that such third parties would notify authorities).

Further extensions of the theory. The five tenets of the theory of vicarious help-seeking are not necessarily the only factors influencing gatekeepers' helping behaviors. Per the philosophy of science, always there is reason to believe that other – either different or additional – forces could be in effect. Indeed, one measure of the utility of a theory is its fecundity with respect to the generation of hypotheses, and the theory of vicarious help-seeking is ripe for further expansion: for example, by testing whether/how personality, biology, and/or biosocial factors might influence vicarious help-seeking.

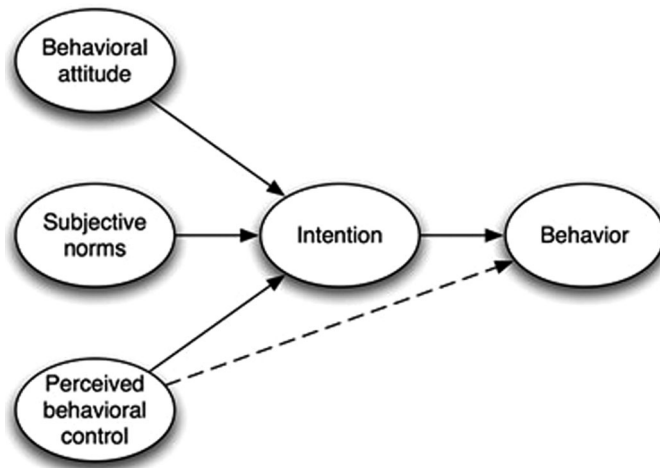


Figure 14. The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991; as cited in Williams et al., 2016a).

Implications

Train gatekeepers on ‘direct intervention.’ Among the implications of the previous studies – in particular, Part 2, which examined how gatekeepers would prefer to intervene in a violence prevention context – is that gatekeeper training could be developed to encourage gatekeepers to help by doing what they are already inclined to do (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). Specifically, the results of Part 2 suggest that gatekeepers ought to be trained to intervene by employing their mode of choice: direct intervention (i.e. how to speak directly with their friends in violence-prevention contexts).

The public’s skepticism regarding counselors’ effectiveness needs to be overcome. Also, given participants’ relatively low proclivity to contact counselors as a part of gatekeeping, another component of gatekeeper training could include raising awareness of both the existence, and potential utility, of counselors: including, for example, those who staff violence-prevention call-centers. Relatedly, based on the finding that participants frequently reported that they ‘don’t think it would help,’ to contact such counselors, call-centers ought to think and plan carefully to develop marketing materials and marketing strategies to overcome such skepticism. This can scarcely be overstated. There is little point to offering what might be an incredibly useful service, if it goes unutilized in times of need.

Recruit friends, family members, mentors, and counselors as gatekeepers. A third implication is that – per Part 4, which examined who, besides friends, might be most influential/effective, as such gatekeepers – the potentially most-influential gatekeepers ought to be prioritized with respect to the development and offering of gatekeeper training. In short, given limitations of both time and funding, it would be prudent to focus such resources on those who would be most effective in their roles as gatekeepers: specifically, friends in-person (versus online friends), parents, other family members, mentors, and professional counselors / psychologists. Taken as a whole, such persons could be considered those whom individuals perceive as their greatest allies/best advocates: those most likely to have one’s best interests in mind.

A further extension of this implication is that psychologists and other professional counselors should learn how to train gatekeepers: to empower clients (should clients have friends considering engaging in violence) to dissuade clients’ friends from violence and/or how to shepherd such friends to third-parties who could help to dissuade them. Given the broad applicability of gatekeeping, it would not be unreasonable for ‘Certified Gatekeeper,’ and ‘Gatekeeper Instructor,’ (or the like) to be professional certifications developed and offered to those in the counseling professions. Such certifications would be useful designations to help inform referrals made by information and referral call-centers (including violence prevention call-centers): affording such call-centers a useful criterion by which to match a given caller’s presenting issues with counseling professionals well-suited to address those issues.

Gatekeeper training/curriculum needs development. Despite the above recommendations regarding gatekeeper training, still the content of such training – a curriculum – has not yet been made publicly available, nor validated through objective evaluation (though instances of both are presently underway [Analytic Services, 2017; WORDE, 2017]). It seems prudent that one component of that content should include what might be considered ‘violence prevention first-aid:’ to empower gatekeepers in attempts

to prevent violence in cases where such need is especially acute/urgent. The rationale is that, although acute/urgent cases perhaps should be brought to the attention of authorities, there might be neither time nor will (on the behalf of gatekeepers) to do so. In such cases, gatekeepers might be not only the first, but only, responders able to prevent such crises. To draw a medical analogy, though severe injuries – for example those involving heavy blood loss – require professional attention, such attention is useless if the bleeding cannot be sufficiently stemmed in the meantime.

A second component of gatekeeper training, at the very heart of affecting vicarious help-seeking, should be instruction on how to persuade a person of concern to engage earnestly (vs. merely ‘going through the motions’ as an act of compliance) with a professional counselor. Despite the value of training gatekeepers in ‘violence prevention first-aid,’ they should not be expected to know, better than those trained in the counseling professions, how to help their friends who have presenting issues that ostensibly justify violence. Nevertheless, as demonstrated by the present set of studies, gatekeepers can play a vital role with respect to violence prevention. As such, they are a resource of virtually inestimable value: a resource that could be developed broadly (e.g. through the development of freely-available training materials and courses) and deeply (e.g. through gatekeeper training/trainer certifications). Consequently, investment in the development of that resource is an investment in the cause of violence prevention.

The broader field of terrorism studies. If terrorism studies is to be a scientific discipline, then it must encourage – rather, demand – the sine qua non of science: replication of findings that support proffered theories. The present work represents one effort in service of that scientific imperative. Additionally, the field of terrorism studies ought to demand stringent tests of its theories, beyond the limited comparisons afforded by correlational studies, to include experimental tests. The present work represents but one effort toward that objective. Through the present replication of an experimentally-obtained set of findings, it is hoped that the tenets of the theory of vicarious help-seeking may be deemed all the more trustworthy since its inception. More importantly, it is hoped the findings from that theory may be placed in service of the greater cause of countering violent extremism.

Note

1. However, these two findings were supported only by qualitative data from a previous sample, and – though nearly significant by conventional standards – were unsupported by that sample’s quantitative data: hence, warranting replication to test whether those findings were spurious.

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