

# **Overcoming Lack of Openness to Change: The Power of Message-Framing Strategies to Increase Bystander Intervention**

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Both practitioners and researchers claim change has become a constant in organizational life. In fact, Beer and Nohria (2000) have made the very dramatic assertion that many organizations must change or die. Although public sector organizations operate in environments less turbulent than those in the private sector, state universities, the military, and federal, state, and local governments are facing significant economic, political, and even social challenges requiring changes in attitudes and behavior. In particular, universities and the military have recently attracted significant attention because of high incidences of sexual assault and lax prosecution of offenders. To combat this problem, both universities and the military have launched extensive sexual assault awareness and prevention campaigns designed to educate its members about rape myths, date rape, bystander intervention, and a number of issues focused on reducing sexual assault and sexual harassment. The primary goals of these education programs are to change thinking about sexual interactions and to alter behavior—for example, the “no means no” campaign and its corollary that every sexual activity requires verbal consent from both parties.

Even if organizations face compelling reasons for change such as public outcry and even threats of congressional intervention, implementing change can be extremely difficult—particularly in large bureaucracies such as the branches of the military. The change literature, which focuses primarily on the private sector, documents numerous change efforts that have failed, some with disastrous consequences (Kyriakidou, 2011). Choi (2011) observed that approximately two thirds of private sector change efforts are unsuccessful, and Burnes (2004) indicated that the change failure rate is probably much higher. This change failure rate is probably even higher in the public sector because it lacks marketplace pressures that can compel change and is ensnared in a complex web of governmental policies, regulations, and laws that reinforce the status quo.

One important barometer indicating the relative difficulty of changing organizational thinking and practice is its members’ openness to change. Not surprisingly, organizations vary significantly in their openness, their willingness, and thus their capability to change. This openness and willingness is particularly important with politically and emotionally charged issues such as sexual harassment and assault. Consequently, gauging an organization’s openness to change is critical if its leaders are to design change communication strategies and processes that its workers will understand, perceive as credible, and believe to be of value to themselves and the organization. Unfortunately, assessing an organization’s openness to change has received limited attention in the organizational change and strategy literature, and almost no attention in the business, managerial, and professional communication literature (Suchan, 2014).

## Research Goals

This study examines an important change initiative that the Navy is attempting to implement to combat sexual assault and harassment: bystander intervention. We first gauge the degree of Navy workers' openness to a bystander intervention campaign by assessing qualitative data gathered from enlisted sailors and officers. Next, we assess the impact of various bystander intervention message-framing strategies on our respondents' thinking, attitudes, and motivation to intervene. In particular, we are interested in the relationship between the degree of openness to change and the power of various framing strategies to shape attitudes and influence behavior. We have posed the following research questions about message framing:

1. Will different framing strategies for sexual assault prevention communication and training have significantly different levels of impact on the audience's motivation to intervene, resulting in some message bystander intervention frames being significantly more effective than others?
2. Will the effectiveness of a framing strategy be influenced by the sex of the person receiving the message, causing some framing strategies to be more effective for men and others for women?
3. Is message frame effectiveness influenced by membership in a particular Navy community (e.g., aviation, special warfare, supply), requiring the need for framing strategies to vary by community?
4. Is framing strategy effectiveness influenced by age? Will some framing strategies be more effective with sailors between the ages of 18 and 24 years, and others more effective with sailors between 25 and 32?

In the following sections, we briefly discuss prior work on openness to change and review the literature on message framing, information processing schema, and discourse communities. Next, we describe the methodology used to gather the study's qualitative and quantitative data. We use our qualitative data to describe sailors' degrees of openness to the Navy's efforts to shape attitudes toward bystander intervention within the context of the Navy's previous communication and training efforts to increase sexual assault awareness. Finally, we analyze the bystander intervention data to determine the impact various framing strategies had on sailors' attitudes toward intervening.

### Limited Research on Openness to Change

Researchers have just begun to systematically investigate openness to organizational change (Kyriakidou, 2011). Because this research is formative, there is no agreed-on language to describe this individual or organizational state. In fact, researchers have used terms such as *openness*, *readiness*, *capability*, *capacity*, and even *resistance toward change* somewhat interchangeably, causing conceptual confusion (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993; Jansen, 2004). To help mitigate this confusion, Chawla and Kelloway (2004) divided change into attitudinal (cognitive) and behavioral responses. Openness to and readiness toward change relate to attitudinal or cognitive responses, whereas resistance, capacity, and capability relate to behavioral responses.

Fishbein and Azjen (1975) pointed out that individuals' attitudes precede and affect their behavior; consequently, their degree of openness or readiness toward change can predict their overt actions. In other words, the degree of openness that an individual feels toward change is the cognitive precursor to

that individual's behaviors of either embracing and working toward implementing a change effort or resisting and even actively undermining that effort (Choi, 2011; Miller, Johnson, & Grau, 1994). This prior research, albeit limited, enables us to define workers' openness to change as psychological states reflecting positive attitudes or perceptions toward change that influence the workers' future willingness to change their behaviors (Axtell et al., 2002; Devos, Buelens, & Bouckennooghe, 2007; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). That degree of openness or readiness should influence the framing of the change message, particularly in the case of an emotionally and politically charged issue such as bystander intervention to prevent sexual harassment and assault.

### **Message Framing, Discourse Communities, and Schema**

We define message frames as strategically chosen language that taps into people's beliefs, values, and moral structures, causing them to both think and act in a particular way (Bateson, 1972; Entman, 1993; Kuypers, 2009; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). These language frames bracket available information that focuses audience attention on the information elements that comprise that frame. As a result, frames include and emphasize particular language, making it more salient to the audience with the goal of promoting a specific interpretation of an event or a situation. At the same time, frames exclude information, backgrounding or even negating interpretations that run counter to the frame creator's goals (Entman, 1993). In short, frames are a micro-level persuasive strategy.

Audience interpretation of frame language is shaped by the schemas, sometimes called cognitive scripts, members have developed. Schemas are pre-existing conceptual systems residing as memory nodes or sets of memory traces that trigger other linguistic associations when people respond to a word or phrase (Hirsch, 1987; Van Gorp, 2007). These associations, which are primarily tacit, shape people's interpretations of language. Furthermore, the networks of schemas derived from organizational membership act as maps that help workers organize and make sense of their workplace experiences and influence their interactions (Rumelhart, 1980). These workplace schema networks are formed and reinforced by the ebb and flow of organizational life: descriptions and discussions about organizational reward systems, control systems (policy and formal rules and regulations), technologies, and resource location and availability. Softer factors such as organizational symbols, rituals, stories, and metaphors are also instrumental in forming these schemas.

The depth and complexity of these linguistic associations vary; some workers' schemas are not well developed, while others are robust and tightly structured. That degree of schema development varies based on workers' length of time spent in the organization, their degree of commitment to that organization and its goals, the number and type of interactions with other organizational members, and the strength of the organization's acculturation process. Through their ongoing interaction, a worker and her/his community of workers co-jointly construct, maintain, and reinforce their organizational schema.

A number of researchers have described this collection or network of shared schema as a *discourse community*. This concept is defined as a grouping of people who share common language norms, characteristics, patterns, and practices as a consequence of their ongoing communications and identifications with each other (Freed & Broadhead, 1987; Killingsworth, 1992; Suchan & Dulek, 1990). To put it another way, these communities have developed shared schemas that promote common interpretation of language and other symbols. For example, when a Marine hears "semper fi," these linguistic cues trigger in most Marines a rich set of common, emotional associations (i.e., schema) about loyalty, duty, family, and brotherhood unique to the Marine Corps discourse community. These associations and their interpretation lead to specific attitudes, motivations, and ultimately behaviors

that help define what it means to be a Marine. The specific language—“semper fi”—is the frame. But the frame’s power and influence are derived from the common linguistic background associations or schema that this frame triggers. In other words, a frame is only as effective as the background associations that it triggers.

Large, complex organizations that divide work into specific functions (e.g., marketing, operations, finance, and human resources) or that have multiple product lines or services will be comprised of multiple discourse communities, each with its own schema, which to some degree overlaps with those of other communities and the organization as a whole. That is the case with the Navy, which has six major communities: surface warfare, special warfare, aviation, supply, submarine, and medical. These communities view the Navy world from different perspectives based on their unique tasks: for example, special warfare and surface warfare commonly describe themselves as “warriors” or at the “tip of the spear,” while the supply corps sees itself as the “business arm” of the Navy. As we discuss in later sections, specific bystander intervention framing strategies may need to be created for each community to tap community-specific schema so as to influence thinking and motivation about bystander intervention.

## **Methods**

The study combined qualitative and quantitative methods, including individual, numeric assessment of various message frames, to communicate the importance of bystander intervention to prevent sexual assault. These numeric assessments were followed by focus group discussions of relevant beliefs, values, prior training, personal experiences, and opinions about Navy efforts to quell sexual assault and the value of bystander intervention programs.

### **Degree of Openness to Change Data**

To determine the degree of openness to a bystander intervention program, we obtained qualitative data from three sources: 48 mid-grade officers (on average, 5–12 years of experience) from a wide range of Navy communities enrolled in an MBA program, 30 enlisted and officers attending a 2½ day Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Summit (SAPR), and 111 enlisted, almost equally divided between men and women, from five major Navy communities. We obtained this data from focus group interactions, group discussions, and breakout meetings during the SAPR Summit; discussions about openness to change during several MBA classes; and written reports analyzing the effectiveness of the Navy’s current communication campaign to change thinking and behavior about sexual harassment and assault.

### **Development of Message Frames**

We conducted a pilot study to obtain feedback and suggestions about message frames to use for this study and to gather insights about the culture and values among enlisted Navy personnel. For this pilot, we collected message-framing strategies from existing programs in universities, military organizations, and public health departments, and from slogans and values promoted by the U.S. Navy. In addition, we brainstormed messaging approaches based on our experience teaching military personnel. Eleven enlisted Navy volunteers assessed this initial collection of frames, providing feedback and suggesting additional approaches based on their prior participation in sexual assault prevention training. Two of the volunteers had worked on sexual assault prevention campaigns among Navy personnel, so they were able to share lessons learned from that experience.

From this pilot work, we created a set of 30 short statements, each representing a different approach to convey information about sexual assault and to encourage bystander intervention. Some statements shared common underlying themes, such as family, Navy values (honor, courage, and commitment), or colorful imagery; others used “salty” Navy language and references to pop culture; and a few included male or female references.

### Message Framing Focus Group Participants

Focus group participants were active-duty, enlisted members of the U.S. Navy. As indicated earlier, 11 volunteers, including seven men and four women, provided feedback on our initial set of message frames. They were not included in the subsequent focus groups. Four focus group sessions, lasting between 1½ and 2 hours, were held in each of five Navy communities. We were unable to contact the submarine community. The focus groups were divided into 18–24-year-old men, 18–24-year-old women, 25–32-year-old men, and 25–32-year-old women. Group sizes and demographics of participants from each community appear in Table 1. Overall, 111 people assessed the 30 communication strategies and participated in the focus group meetings.

**Table 1.**  
**Participant Demographics**

Community	24 Years and Under		25 Years and Up	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Medical	6	6	6	8
Supply Corps	4	4	5	5
Special Operations	5	3	5	4
Surface Warfare	5	7	4	3
Aviation	5	10	11	5
Totals	25	30	31	25

### Measures

Thirty message frames were tested, each on a separate half-sheet of paper. Four questions, intended to measure distinct aspects of message effectiveness, appeared below each frame. Each question was followed by a seven-point Likert scale anchored by 1 = “not at all” and 7 = “great extent.” The questions were as follows:

1. To what extent is this message memorable?
2. To what extent is this message motivating?
3. To what extent would this message influence sailors’ attitudes?
4. To what extent would this message influence sailors’ behaviors?

We expected that the answers to these four questions would form a reliable scale of effectiveness for each frame.

### Procedures

Participants were recruited through local contacts who served as sexual assault prevention advocates or representatives. They distributed our recruiting information to members of each community and

arranged meeting places and times for volunteers. They also managed the number of volunteers, attempting to recruit between four and six people for each sex/age/community group.

At the beginning of every group meeting, we distributed consent forms, handouts that repeated our recruiting information, and demographic sheets for the participants to fill in. Because of the potential for a discussion of bystander intervention to trigger painful emotions, we particularly emphasized the voluntary nature of participation and invited anyone who felt uncomfortable to leave at any time. We further protected participants' confidentiality by giving each person an ID number and asking them to use that number when responding to a question or commenting on what someone had said during the focus group sessions. This confidentiality was important to ensure that participants could share their thoughts without worrying about possible reactions from their chains of command.

The focus group sessions were divided into two parts. During the first part, we asked each participant to individually assess 30 message frames, with the understanding that each frame represented a general approach to a communication campaign that would convey the following three-part message: sexual assault is harmful, intervention is appropriate, and the bystander should intervene when necessary. The frames were at most a sentence or two long and contained language that might evoke thoughtful or emotional responses in the target audiences. As mentioned earlier, some message frames contained family metaphors, others referenced Navy core values, some used "salty" Navy language, and others referenced popular culture. We varied the frames' order of presentation within each focus group to avoid order effects on responses. After everyone in the group had completed the 30 assessments, we asked them to choose their three favorite frames and to choose three frames they disliked and thought should not be used.

In the second parts of the sessions, participants responded to open-ended questions. To prime the discussion, we asked each participant to discuss the message frames they thought would be most effective among their peers. After everyone had presented their favorites, we next asked them to discuss the message frames that they thought would be least effective. These responses provided detailed information about the individual's and the community's conceptual systems or mental structures—the factors that influenced their interpretations of the frames, their attitudes toward them, and their emotional reactions. We followed up with additional questions about their reasoning and invited comments and suggestions for conveying the desired information and motivation for bystander intervention.

## **Analysis Methods**

We used the following methods to analyze the message frame data we collected:

1. We calculated mean scores for respondents' assessments of the 30 message frames they evaluated to determine which frames were memorable, motivating, and likely to influence sailors' attitudes and actions.
2. We conducted factor analysis of the message frames to determine whether the frames fell into groups. The factor reflected by this grouping—for example, family or moral action—enabled us to identify an overarching theme that embedded all of the constituent frames. These factors would also provide the types of frames the Navy could use to create overarching bystander intervention frames for its information campaign and training materials.
3. We determined whether age, gender, and Navy community contributed to significant differences in the mean assessment level for each theme.

## Results

### Degree of Openness to Change

Sexual Assault Prevention and Response, more commonly called SAPR, is the Department of Defense's, and thus the Navy's, education and training program designed to prevent and respond to sexual assault while preserving mission readiness. The Navy's planned bystander intervention communication campaign is embedded within SAPR. In our research, both enlisted and officers indicated a significant lack of openness to additional Navy sexual harassment and assault efforts. Not surprisingly, this lack of openness was more pronounced in men than women. This context indicates that a Navy education campaign to shift attitudes and change behavior about bystander intervention would need to artfully frame its message to begin decreasing or counteracting this lack of openness. Factors that contributed to this lack of openness are described in this section.

Both enlisted and officer respondents stated frequently they were "SAPR'd out," "suffering from SAPR fatigue," "tired of stale SAPR training," and "numb to SAPR." Often, these statements were made with significant emotion—anger, frustration, and exasperation with the entire SAPR campaign. Not surprisingly, many sailors, primarily men, appear to be psychologically closed to additional sexual assault and harassment programs such as bystander intervention training.

What led to these SAPR characterizations was training that was repetitive and poorly designed. Furthermore, many trainers lacked training skills and SAPR knowledge, and displayed little enthusiasm for or even interest in the SAPR issues they were describing. Respondents complained about trainings conducted in very large groups with as many as 150 people; material presented in numerous, mind-numbing PowerPoint slides ("death by PowerPoint" was a term commonly used); training material not tailored to the community's interests, values, or subculture; lack of progression in training content, resulting in the same material covered repeatedly; lack of thought about training timing and appropriate length; and little or no opportunity for discussion of training content. These perceptions caused many respondents to believe that SAPR training was merely a "check in the box," that the sexual assault problem was not as serious as senior leadership was claiming, or that the Navy was merely responding to very strong pressure from Congress and special interest groups with a "feminist agenda." In contrast, several respondents described SAPR training that was powerful, that emotionally moved them, and that they remembered vividly even several years later. That training was the exception.

Several Navy officers also pointed out that SAPR training used criminal metaphors to describe sexual assault: "perpetrators," "perps," "stalkers," and so on. These officers felt that this language, which implies every officer is a potential criminal, is a source of anger and defensiveness. They also pointed out that these metaphors impede listening, make people unwilling to engage in dialogue about SAPR, contribute to distortions or misinterpretations of SAPR messages, and ultimately undermine SAPR goals. In all likelihood, this language is the product of training focused largely on the more extreme forms of sexual assault such as rape, date rape, and sodomy, rather than less violent forms such as improper touching or activities classified as sexual harassment. As one officer stated, "You mean to tell me I'm a criminal if I pat on the ass a female E-3 for a good job. ... I don't think so."

Finally, both officers and enlisted believed the Navy was being unfairly singled out by Congress and special interest groups for having sexual assault problems more acute than other organizations or groups. They pointed out that this problem was societal, existing to the same or greater extent in

universities, in sports, and in communities in general, anywhere that there is a large proportion of people under 25. These sailors wanted to see data indicating that sexual assault rates were higher in the Navy than in other organizations.

SAPR issue fatigue, the ineffectiveness of previous SAPR training, and the perception that the Navy is being unfairly singled out as having a significant sexual assault problem create an environment in which there may be limited openness to a new initiative like bystander intervention. These perceptions underscore the necessity for the Navy to carefully frame and craft bystander messages if they are to have an effect on sailors' attitudes and behaviors. Furthermore, sailors are bombarded with Navy messages and must complete numerous training programs on an annual basis; consequently, the media used to communicate bystander messages must be carefully chosen so that sailors will notice these messages amid the sea of other communications. The next section determines whether there are ways to overcome this "SAPR'd out" perception by strategically framing bystander messages based on age, gender, and community differences.

### **Message Framing Results**

We tested respondents' assessments of the 30 frames to determine whether the four questions (memorable, motivating, likely to affect attitudes, likely to affect behaviors) formed reliable scales. In all cases, the four items did form reliable scales, with Cronbach's alphas above .9. We created scale scores for each of the frames, using the average response to each of the four items.

We then used factor analysis to determine whether the 30 frames formed conceptual clusters that reflected the same underlying concepts. The results indicated that the 30 frames formed six distinct conceptual clusters that we call *framing themes*. These six framing themes, listed as follows, focus on potential victims versus potential offenders and are oriented toward relationships, personal attributes, language and imagery, or presentation of facts:

- Personal moral strength to take protective action
- Colloquial language to motivate risk-taking to prevent an offense
- Family
- Strong images to prevent a friend from inappropriate action
- Eye-catching information and obligation
- Help a friend to avoid Captain's Mast (i.e., Navy punishment)

We answered our research questions by using repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) with between-subjects factors, pairwise comparisons, and *t*-tests. Explanations from our focus group participants expanded our understanding of the statistics. Participants' experiences and advice revealed a wide range of personal, cultural, and organizational factors that have been, and will likely continue, impacting sailors' responses to bystander intervention messages.

### **Impact of Different Framing Strategies on Motivation to Intervene**

Our first research question—will different framing strategies for sexual assault prevention information have significantly different levels of impact on the audience's motivation to intervene?—was supported by results of repeated-measures (within-subjects) ANOVA. Using the Greenhouse-Geisser adjustment for



data that do not meet the assumption of sphericity, we found that the differences in assessed effectiveness of the six themes were significant ( $F [4.383, 460.213] = 23.721, p < .001$ ).

Means, standard deviations, sample sizes, and confidence intervals for all framing themes appear in Table 2. The variance between men and women and between Navy communities was high, with some people, particularly men, tending to rate every frame low and, thus, the frame themes, while others, particularly women, tended to rate all frames higher. For example, most of the people in the Special Operations community were negative about all frames and, in general, negative about the relevance of sexual assault training and messaging to their work situation. Nevertheless, we found clear differences in the reported effectiveness of the various framing approaches, with the Family theme rated significantly above all others ( $p < .001$  for all comparisons, using the Bonferroni adjustment for multiple tests). Strength to Protect, Eye-Catching Information and Obligation, and Captain's Mast received intermediate ratings, significantly below Family and significantly above the Slang Risk-Taking and Preventive Imagery themes.

**Table 2.**  
***Assessment of Effectiveness for Each Framing Theme***

Framing Theme	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Strength to Protect	4.1481	1.29877	106	3.898	4.398
Slang Risk-Taking	3.6547	1.47712	106	3.370	3.939
Family	5.0814	1.53685	106	4.785	5.377
Preventive Imagery	3.5480	1.41953	106	3.275	3.821
Eye-Catching Info and Obligation	4.1333	1.52853	106	3.839	4.428
Captain's Mast	4.2594	1.87969	106	3.897	4.621

### **Framing Effectiveness Strategies Based on Sex**

Our second research question—are some framing strategies more effective for male audiences and others for female audiences?—received partial support. Overall, women rated the Family theme ( $p = .003$ ) and the Strength to Protect theme ( $p = .009$ ) more favorably than men did, but this difference is somewhat influenced by the overall tendency of women to give higher ratings to all framing themes. In addition, women rated the Eye-Catching Information and Obligation theme .5 higher than men; however, the difference fell just below our .10 threshold of statistical significance. As Table 3 indicates, men and women had similar ratings of the other three framing themes.

**Table 3.**  
***Comparison of Men's and Women's Assessments of Framing Themes***

Theme	Sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Strength to Protect	Male	56	3.8715	1.32150
	Female	55	4.5014	1.17452
Preventive Imagery	Male	56	3.5461	1.50083
	Female	55	3.6364	1.31472
Slang Risk-Taking	Male	56	3.6181	1.51529
	Female	55	3.7416	1.47132
Family	Male	56	4.6853	1.59438
	Female	55	5.5409	1.32922
Eye-Catching Info and Obligation	Male	56	3.9561	1.65292
	Female	55	4.4402	1.37080
Captain's Mast	Male	53	4.2075	1.90441
	Female	53	4.3113	1.87141

#### **Differences in Framing Themes by Community**

Our third research question—is framing strategy effectiveness influenced by membership in a particular community?—was partially supported. When we controlled for variations in responses between men and women, we found that some communities were more positive than others toward sexual assault prevention messaging ( $p = .03$ ). For example, the Aviation community's mean scores for most of the themes were higher than the mean scores of other communities. On the other hand, the Special Warfare mean scores were lower than the mean scores in other communities. A one-way ANOVA comparing mean assessment scores across communities indicates that there are significant differences in communities' assessments of the Preventive Imagery ( $p = .024$ ) and Eye-Catching Information and Obligation ( $p = .005$ ) frames. Mean assessment scores for each theme are broken out by community in Table 4.

**Table 4.**  
**Mean Assessments of Themes by Community**

	Strength to Protect	Preventive Imagery	Slang Risk-Taking	Family	Eye-Catching Info and Obligation	Captain's Mast
Medical Supply Corps	4.0250	3.2853	3.7500	4.5481	4.3349	4.2212
Special Warfare	4.5625	4.1991	3.7778	5.1597	4.1296	4.7500
Surface Warfare	3.7471	3.2892	3.2324	4.9706	3.2255	3.6029
Aviation	4.0145	3.0351	3.4026	5.1645	3.8202	3.8026
Total	4.4397	4.0000	3.9774	5.5927	4.8804	4.7212
	4.1836	3.5908	3.6793	5.1092	4.1959	4.2594

#### Differences in Framing Strategies Based on Age

Research Question 4—is message framing effectiveness influenced by age category?—was partially supported. Younger sailors tended to be more positive toward bystander messaging than older ones (see Table 5). This effect remained significant when controlling for within-subjects variance across themes ( $F(1,86) = 13.082, p = .001$ ). As a result, people who were 24 years of age or younger tended to respond more favorably than their older colleagues to most of the themes. Both age groups preferred the same four themes, but the Captain's Mast theme, highlighting the need to prevent friends from making mistakes that could get them in trouble, resonated more with the younger sailors ( $p = .017$ ).

**Table 5.**  
**Comparison of Framing Theme Assessments by Age Category**

	Age Category	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-score and p-value
Strength to Protect	24 Years and Under	55	4.3986	1.23071	$t = 1.765$
	25 Years and Up	56	3.9724	1.31231	$p = .08$
Preventive Imagery	24 Years and Under	55	3.8818	1.50254	$t = 2.195$
	25 Years and Up	56	3.3051	1.25270	$p = .03$
Slang Risk-Taking	24 Years and Under	55	4.0127	1.41353	$t = 2.390$
	25 Years and Up	56	3.3518	1.49902	$p = .019$
Family	24 Years and Under	55	5.4705	1.23743	$t = 2.542$
	25 Years and Up	56	4.7545	1.69826	$p = .013$
Eye-Catching Info and Obligation	24 Years and Under	55	4.4114	1.49893	$t = 1.476$
	25 Years and Up	56	3.9844	1.54835	$p = .143$
Captain's Mast	24 Years and Under	55	4.6818	1.60760	$t = 2.437$
	25 Years and Up	51	3.8039	2.05445	$p = .017$

In summary, we identified several consistent effects. First, distinct framing strategies for sexual assault prevention information had significantly different levels of impact on the audience's motivation to intervene. The way bystander messages were framed did affect message impact. The Family theme was most likely to be effective as a general framing strategy across all communities. Secondly, the effectiveness of a framing strategy was influenced by age, sex, and community. These demographics

interact, indicating that well-tailored information campaigns should adjust their framing approaches to reach specific target audiences. This goal could be accomplished by supplementing a Navy-wide bystander intervention campaign with messages tailored to specific communities.

Finally, to enable a quick comparison of responses to the framing themes, we broke out, in Table 6, the means for the four themes that received the highest ratings by community, age cohort, and sex. For each demographic group, the two preferred themes appear in bold print. The preferred theme among young men in the Supply Corps was Preventive Imagery (mean = 5.33), which does not appear in this chart. The older men in Special Operations preferred Family, with Slang Risk-Taking as their second choice (mean = 2.83). Note that some groups, such as men 25 and older in the medical and special operations communities, were negative toward all of these frames. This reflects their general attitude toward sexual assault prevention messages. In those communities, stronger efforts to change the overall belief structure about the suitability of women in the service may be necessary before an information campaign or training program can be expected to have a positive impact.

## **Discussion**

This study was designed to determine the degree of openness to bystander intervention messages as a way of combating sexual assault and harassment, to identify bystander message-framing strategies that resonate with Navy personnel, and to determine whether differences among community, sex, and age groups affect sailors' responses to message frames. Our data indicate that sailors are suffering from sexual assault and harassment issue fatigue, resulting in the often-repeated phrase, "we're SAPR'd out." As indicated earlier, this attitude has most likely been caused by repetitive, unimaginative training that is often conducted by unqualified personnel. This training has resulted in the perception that the SAPR program is merely a "check in the box"; the poor framing of training materials has caused a number of sailors, particularly officers, to feel they were being labeled as potential criminals or deviants; and many sailors have come to believe that the Navy has been unfairly singled out by Congress and special interest groups.

The quantitative data suggest that SAPR issue fatigue is felt more acutely by sailors 25 and older. As Table 5 shows, the 25-plus group scored each theme lower than the 24 and under group. The differences were statistically significant for five of the six framing themes. We believe the major cause of these lower scores is that the 25-plus groups have encountered numerous variations of SAPR trainings since approximately 2008 that they believe were repetitious and poorly done. In contrast, the 24 and under group is made up of sailors fresh out of boot camp, many with less than three years in the service; consequently, they had significantly less experience with SAPR training than the older groups. Combating SAPR issue fatigue poses a significant challenge to the Navy because it leads to a lack of openness and in many cases a resistance to a new sexual assault and harassment program such as bystander intervention. This lack of openness makes it imperative that the Navy carefully frame its bystander messages and strategically choose media to overcome message saturation to shatter the cynicism and resistance to additional sexual assault and harassment messages.

Table 6.

*Mean Assessments of Effective Themes, by Community, Age, and Sex*

Community	Age Category	Family	Captain's Mast	Strength to Protect	Eye-Catching Info and Obligation
Medical	Men $\leq$ 24	4.04	<b>4.54</b>	4.28	<b>4.83</b>
	Women $\leq$ 24	<b>5.31</b>	<b>4.88</b>	4.20	4.66
	Men 25 & Up	3.06	<b>3.38</b>	3.32	<b>3.43</b>
	Women 25 & Up	<b>5.47</b>	4.13	4.24	<b>4.40</b>
Supply	Men $\leq$ 24 <sup>a</sup>	<b>5.00</b>	4.44	3.91	3.60
Corps	Women $\leq$ 24	<b>5.97</b>	5.13	<b>5.33</b>	<b>5.33</b>
	Men 25 & Up	<b>5.00</b>	<b>4.80</b>	3.99	3.92
	Women 25 & Up	<b>4.80</b>	4.65	<b>5.06</b>	3.80
Special	Men $\leq$ 24	<b>5.50</b>	<b>6.20</b>	4.84	4.58
Operations	Women $\leq$ 24	<b>6.67</b>	2.83	<b>4.87</b>	3.28
	Men 25 & Up <sup>b</sup>	<b>3.00</b>	2.15	1.92	1.72
	Women 25 & Up	<b>5.50</b>	2.75	<b>3.83</b>	3.38
Surface	Men $\leq$ 24	<b>5.08</b>	3.50	<b>3.82</b>	2.62
Warfare	Women $\leq$ 24	<b>5.89</b>	<b>4.79</b>	4.50	4.52
	Men 25 & Up	<b>5.59</b>	3.63	3.64	<b>4.19</b>
	Women 25 & Up	3.04	2.25	<b>3.72</b>	<b>3.69</b>
Aviation	Men $\leq$ 24	<b>5.63</b>	<b>4.70</b>	4.11	4.63
	Women $\leq$	<b>5.86</b>	4.88	4.43	<b>4.93</b>
	Men 25 & Up	<b>5.13</b>	4.56	4.34	<b>4.86</b>
	Women 25 & Up	<b>6.05</b>	4.67	5.02	<b>5.08</b>

<sup>a</sup> Supply Corps men  $\leq$  24 preferred Preventive Imagery (mean = 5.33).

<sup>b</sup> Special Operations men 25 and up rated Slang Risk-Taking as their second choice (mean = 2.83).

Our research determined that distinct framing strategies for bystander intervention messages have significantly different levels of impact on the audience's motivation to intervene. Framing strategies that reference kinship ties and draw on family-based roles, identities, and emotions are most effective across

all communities. In short, message frames that referenced family and protection of brothers and sisters had a significant impact on motivation to intervene across all age groups, sex, and communities with several exceptions. Based on focus group discussions, this notion of a Navy family is particularly strong when sailors are deployed—on assignment aboard a ship or in a foreign country away from their home installation. This time can be stressful, particularly aboard a ship, with sailors working 12-hour days at an up-tempo work pace; as a result, sailors must rely on each other for many types of support, causing them to become like a family to one another. Furthermore, this framing strategy triggered strong emotional reactions in many sailors in our 24-and-under age group. Many are away from home for the first time and in a unique, unfamiliar environment; consequently, the Navy as a substitute family strongly resonates with these sailors. However, the power of this frame shifts to sailors' personal families when they are in a shore assignment. This change is pronounced for sailors who live off base, are married, or are in a stable relationship with another person.

Although the family frame was effective across all age groups and almost all communities, our research also determined that the effectiveness of a framing strategy is influenced by age, sex, and community. For example, to reach sailors 24 and under, frames that focus on keeping fellow sailors out of trouble (Captain's Mast frame), stepping up to protect a sailor from assault (Strength to Protect frames), and blending compelling metaphors with facts (Eye-catching Information) are particularly effective. Women's motivation to intervene is influenced by the Strength to Protect, Eye-catching Information, and Captain's Mast frames. And the Captain's Mast and Strength to Protect frames resonated with the supply community, while only the family frames had an impact on the special warfare and surface warfare communities. In short, a well-tailored bystander information campaign needs to adjust its approaches to reach specific target audiences.

## **Conclusion**

Despite sailors' feelings that they are "SAPR'd out," choosing compelling frames based on the Navy's unique language communities increases, for the most part, the likelihood that bystander intervention messages will rationally and emotionally resonate with sailors, leading to a greater mindfulness about the need for intervention and, one hopes, a greater number of interventions. However, men 25 and older in the medical and special operations communities and, rather surprisingly, women 25 and older in the surface warfare community did not respond favorably to any of the framing themes. This strong emotional resonance that helps change thinking and behavior begins to develop when sailor frame interpretation is seen as residing internally, originating from sailors' long-held, primarily tacit, conceptual systems and the robust schema that provide structure and order to these systems. Simply put, sailors' positive psychological responses to these frames reflect the belief that bystander intervention is "the right thing to do." In contrast, sailors will more than likely respond to poorly framed messages as originating from "outside themselves," thus tapping into ill-defined schema and generating limited rational and emotional resonance.

Effective message frames alone will not change sailors' attitudes toward bystander intervention, particularly among sailors who believe that the Navy's sexual assault and harassment problems have been overstated. Persuasion is not a one-shot communication event. However, effective message frames can prime sailors to be psychologically open to bystander intervention behavior. Navy leadership would need to build on these compelling frames by designing effective training programs, championing bystander intervention efforts, guaranteeing that people are not punished for intervening in a situation involving a superior, and, in general, ensuring that all Navy organizational systems are aligned to support bystander intervention goals.

Although this bystander research has focused on the Navy and its unique community cultures, our results may help universities and other organizations grappling with ways to combat sexual assault and harassment through bystander education and training. Careful framing of bystander messages can begin the complex process of motivating people to intervene not only in sexual assault but also sexual harassment situations. Choosing appropriate frames, though, will require universities and other organizations to decide which language triggers strong rational and emotional reactions in their target audiences. For example, at universities different frames in all likelihood will be required for male and female undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty. Making these strategic framing choices requires significant effort and a sincere commitment to combat sexual assault and harassment.

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