

What are my options? Prompting option generation with varying goals in a context of potential sexual assault

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Background

- We often present participants with a set of options from which to choose.
- Yet real-world decisions often lack pre-defined options.
- Option generation is critical to decision-making: It determines the options from which people choose.



Katie (Sara's friend) and Jim (Ted's friend) on dance floor



Sara Ted

Describe as many things as you can think of that could be done to avoid the chance of unwanted sexual contact/activity between Sara and Ted in this sort of situation.

Method

- 99 undergraduates: 68 females, 31 males
- Read a hypothetical scenario characteristic of sexual assault
- Generated options for preventing unwanted sexual activity (5+ mins.)
- Prompts varied in terms of additional explicitly stated goals
- Entered options into spreadsheet that recorded timestamp for each option

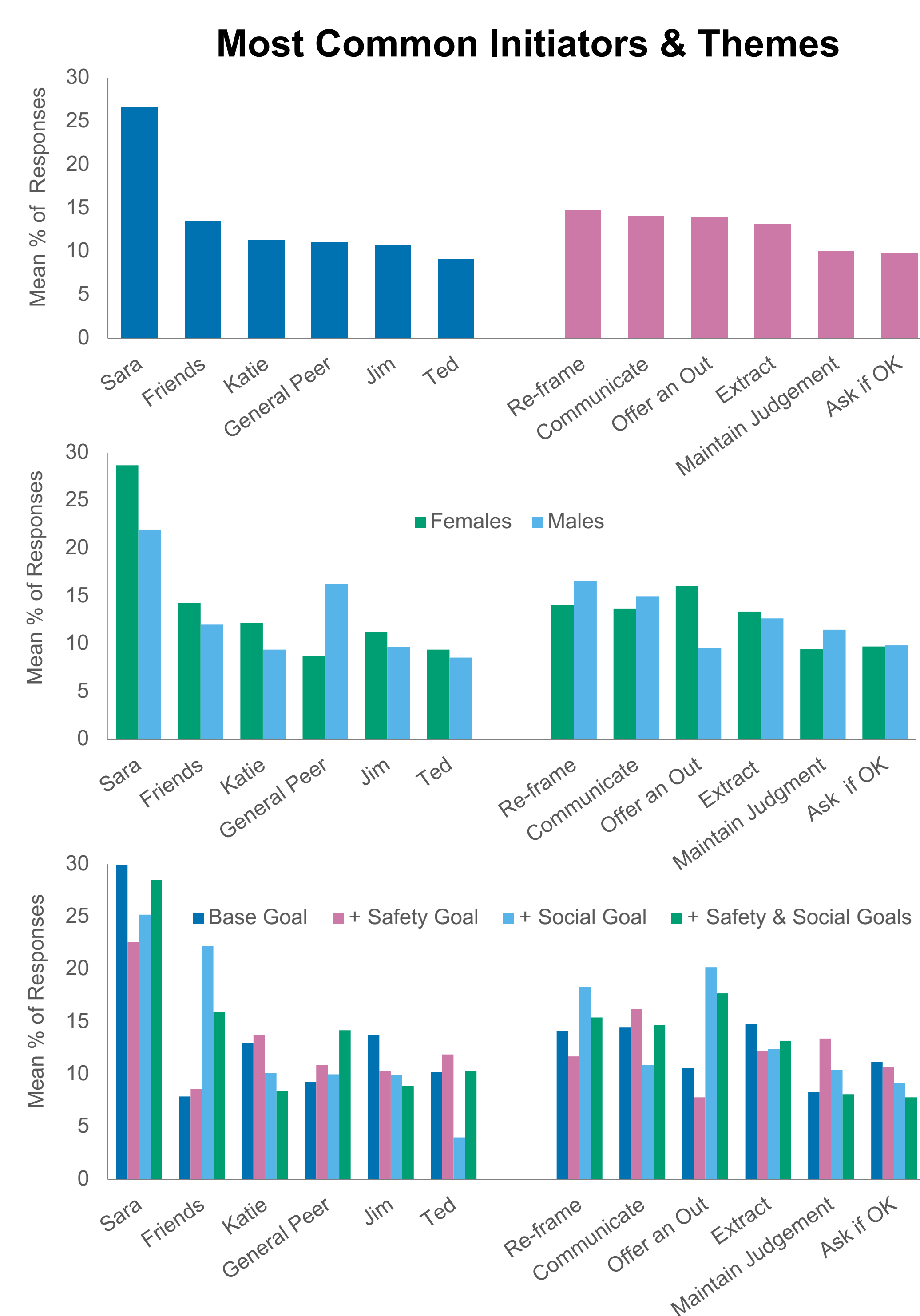
Given extended time, what is the range and nature of options that participants generate—i.e., their self-generated option set?

And given findings that we often choose the first option we generate in time-pressured situations, what is the nature of the first options that participants generate?

In this exploratory study, we began to examine these questions, focusing on a situation of significance to undergraduate students and society at large.

All Options: Initiators & Themes

Open coding revealed a range of initiators and themes.

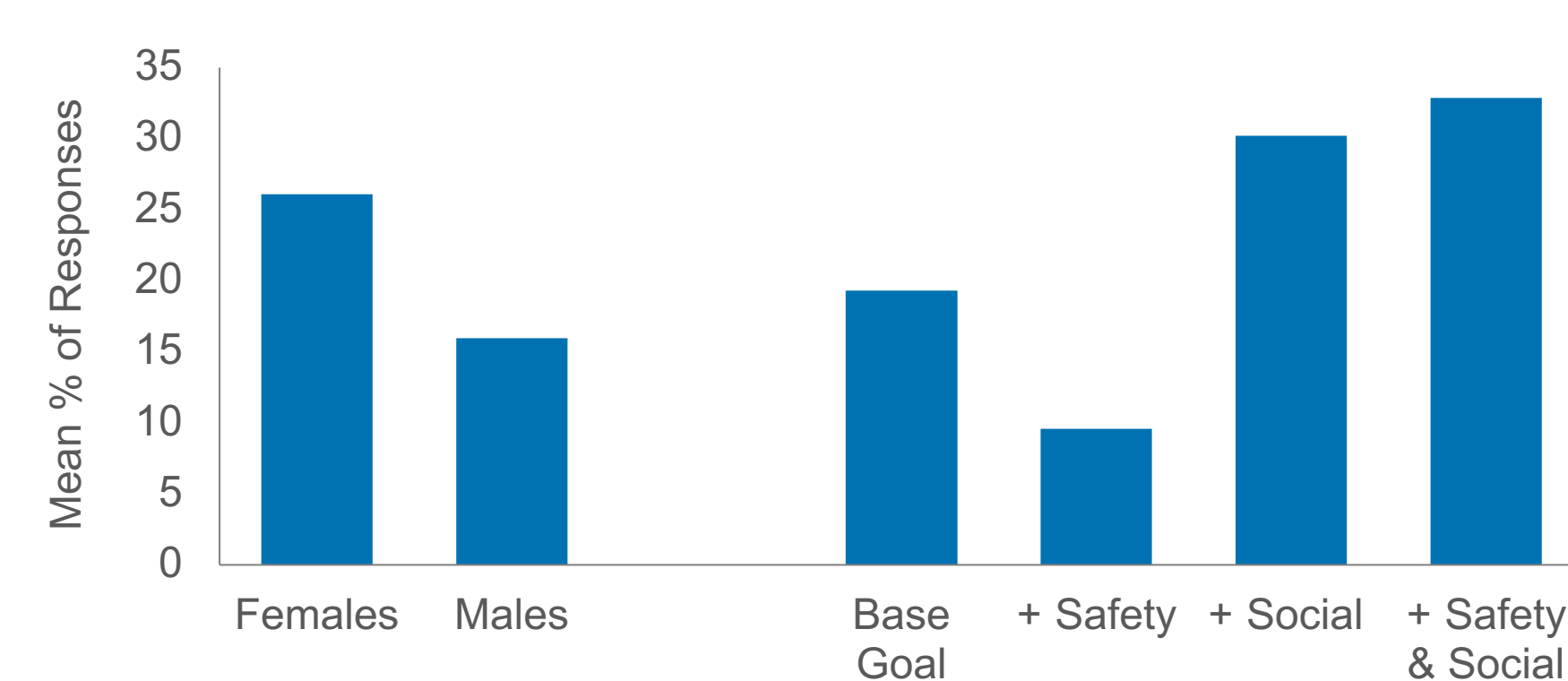


*General Peer: any young adult, excluding Sara or Ted; assigned to vague options

Some less common initiators: authority figures, peer leaders, organizations

Some less common themes: risk reduction, educate, consent, monitor situation, do nothing

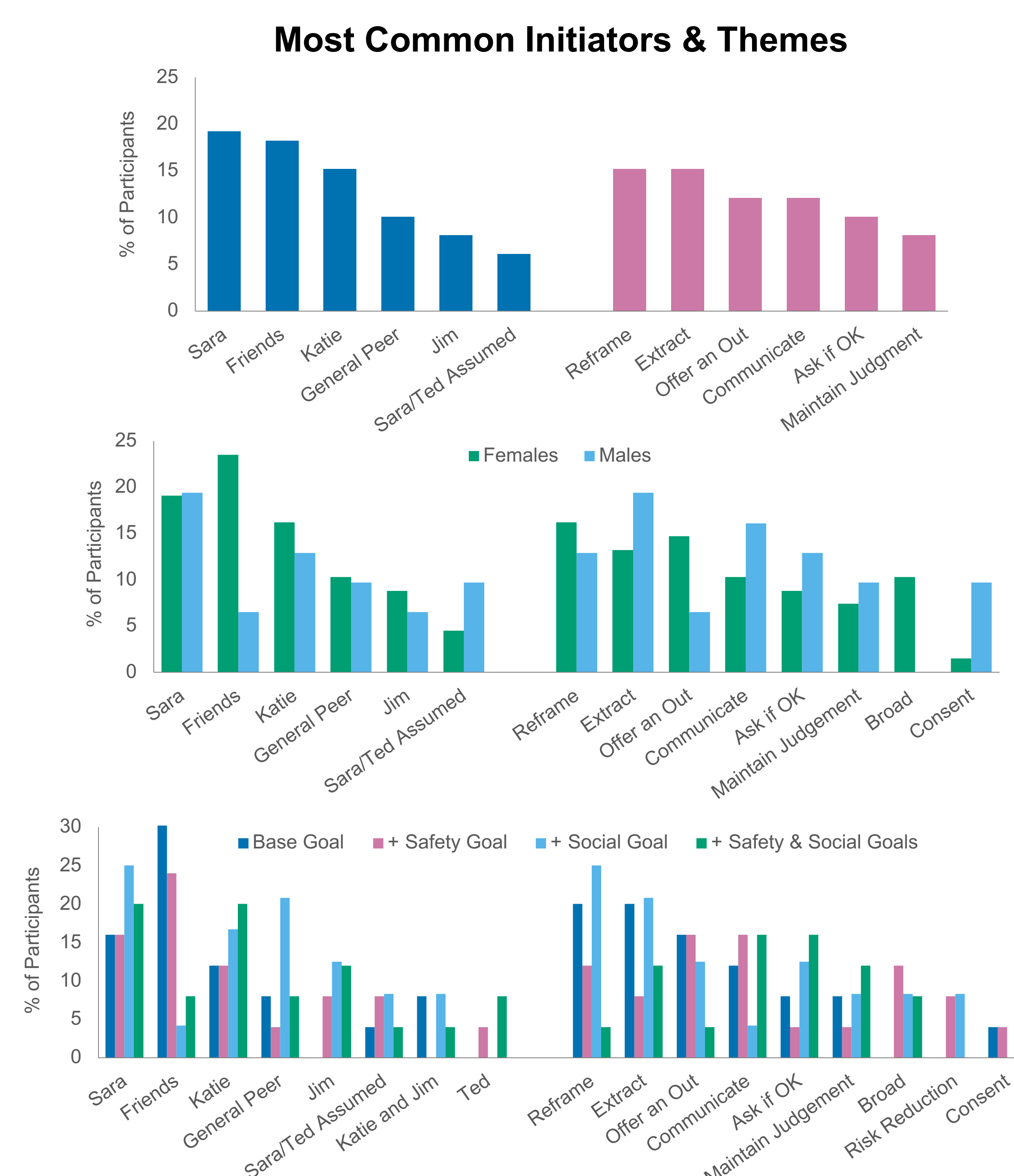
An emergent attribute, Offering an Excuse, is also noteworthy, characterizing on average 23% of all options, and 17% of first options.



First Options: Initiators & Themes

Prior studies suggest that in real-world, time-constrained situations, participants may simply choose their first generated option.

What did participants' first options look like?



*Extra themes and initiators were added when a goal condition or gender's top 6 were not represented by the overall top 6 initiators and themes.

Some Sample Options

- *Katie could join them as they walk upstairs* (Re-frame)
- *Sara could tell Ted that she isn't interested* (Communicate)
- *Jim can pretend that he needs Ted to help him with something* (Offer an Out)
- *Pull Ted to the side and distract him while Sara makes a run for the door* (Extract)
- *Ted stops getting Sara drinks* (Maintain Judgment)
- *Sara's friends could go over to Sara to see if everything is okay* (Ask if OK)

Overall Option Diversity

Number of Options Generated	Number of Initiators Generated				Number of Themes Generated				
	Mean	SD	Max	Min	Mean	SD	Max	Min	
Overall	15.1	5.9	35	5	Overall	6.5	1.8	12	2
Females	16.5	6.2	35	5	Females	5.1	2.1	12	1
Males	12.1	4.1	20	6	Males	4.7	1.7	9	2
Base Goal	16.8	6.4	28	6	Base Goal	5.2	1.7	9	3
+ Safety	14.6	7.1	35	5	+ Safety	5.7	2.4	12	2
+ Social	15.0	5.2	31	7	+ Social	4.5	1.6	8	2
+ Safety & Social	13.9	4.8	24	5	+ Safety & Social	4.4	2.0	10	1

Summary Points

	All Options		First Options	
	Most Common Initiator	Most Common Theme	Most Common Initiator	Most Common Theme
Overall	Sara	Re-frame	Sara	Re-frame & Extract
Females	Sara	Offer an Out	Friends	Re-frame
Males	Sara	Re-frame	Sara	Extract
Base Goal	Sara	Extract	Friends	Re-frame & Extract
+ Safety	Sara	Communicate	Friends	Offer an Out & Communicate
+ Social	Sara	Offer an Out	Sara	Re-frame
+ Safety & Social	Sara	Offer an Out	Sara & General Peer	Communicate & Ask if OK

All Options

- Females generated more options, initiators, and themes than males; an overarching goal yielded more options than additional goals
- Options involving excuses were more commonly generated by females and in goal conditions with a social component

First Options

- Interestingly, excuses were again more common among options generated by females, but less likely in conditions with a social component

Reflections

- Participant-generated options are a rich source of data, with each option embodying multiple components and characteristics (e.g., initiator, theme), even beyond those represented here (e.g., recipient).
- Option characteristics may be:
 - anticipated (e.g., extract) or emergent (e.g., excuse)
 - situation-general (e.g., an initiator) or situation-specific (e.g., authority figure)

- Examination of option set characteristics can reveal both patterns and individual variability in the options people consider in a particular situation. e.g., In a possible sexual-assault scenario,
 - The potential victim may be commonly viewed as more responsible for taking action than others—even the potential perpetrator.
 - Both explicit and implicit goals may impact the kinds of options participants think of, such as generating more options involving excuses if one wants to maintain social relationships.

- Participant-generated options can valuably inform decision-making interventions. e.g., Do participants generate effective, evidence-based options?
 - If not, interventions can seek to highlight these.
 - If so, interventions can target other aspects of the decision-making process.
- Exploratory studies can offer meaningful directions for future, more systematic and statistical investigation.

Supplemental Information: Study Scenario

It's Saturday night, and there's a big party at one of the campus fraternity houses. Before the party, Sara and some of her friends decide to get together at one of their dorm rooms. One of their friends brings cranberry juice and liquor and they mix some drinks and chat for a while before heading out. When they get to the party, it's in full swing and everyone seems to be having a good time. A bunch more people begin to dance as the music gets louder and Sara and her friends join in. Not long after, Ted—who Sara knows from one of her classes—approaches Sara and her friends. Ted offers them some of, and begins dancing with Sara. Ted is well-known and well-liked on campus, and Sara is flattered by his attention. "You look great tonight!" says Ted, putting his arm around her.

Sara's friend Katie watches as Ted and Sara start to move away from the larger group, dancing and flirting with each other. Seeing his friend Jim, Ted motions to him to bring them two beers. Jim notices that Sara doesn't really seem to want the beer; Ted gets her a mixed drink and encourages her to have some. As they continue to dance, Ted pulls Sara closer and they begin to kiss. Ted touches Sara more and more and she begins to feel uncomfortable. She stops dancing and tries to pull away, but Ted moves closer. Sara wonders if Ted understands that she is feeling uncomfortable. She really likes him and doesn't want to hurt his feelings.

Ted puts his arm around Sara's waist and starts to lead her toward the stairs. As they pass by, both Katie and Jim hear Sara say, "I was having fun dancing — let's stay down here."

"Let's go somewhere we can talk," Ted says, moving them closer to the stairs. "It's too loud out here." Ted continues to lead Sara toward the stairs. No one—including Sara, Ted, Katie, or Jim—wants this to turn into a situation where unwanted sexual contact or activity occurs.