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Minority and majority-ethnic status adolescents' bystander responses to racism in school

Abstract

Twelve to fifteen year olds (N=1100) from minority- and majority-ethnic backgrounds, living in an ethnically diverse area in the UK, read a hypothetical scenario about verbal racism in school and indicated their bystander responses (prosocial, aggressive, passive). Findings showed age, ethnicity, cross-group friendships and ethnic socialisation predicted their bystander responses.

KEY TERMS: Adolescence; Bystander; Bias-based bullying; Cross-group friendship; Development; Ethnic socialisation; Minority and Majority-status; Racism

Increasing diversity in our communities means that children are more likely to attend racially, ethnically and religiously diverse schools. A potential side-effect of attending a diverse school is the increased likelihood of experiencing racism and bias-based bullying. Negative effects of bias-based bullying on well-being are well-established (Priest et al., 2012) and require more attention within school-based anti-bullying programmes which, to date, have been found to be less effective in diverse settings (Evans, Fraser & Cotter, 2014). Research increasingly demonstrates the *positive* impact that witnesses or "bystanders" can play in challenging and reducing bullying incidents in schools (Polanin, Espelage & Pigott, 2012; Salmivalli, 2014); yet the focus on individual difference predictors (i.e., empathy, self-efficacy) might be one reason why anti-bullying programmes are less effective during bias-based incidents, which involve additional issues of prejudice (e.g., Killen, Mulvey & Hitti, 2013).

Recent evidence shows that bystanders are effective at reducing bias-based bullying (Abbott & Cameron, 2014; Mulvey, Palmer & Abrams, 2016; Palmer, Rutland & Cameron, 2015), but the likelihood of helping is influenced by "intergroup" factors. That is, factors such as group membership and identity (Palmer et al., 2015), group bias (Abbott & Cameron, 2014), group norms (i.e., group-specific expectations for behaviour) and awareness of group-related repercussions (Mulvey et al., 2016; Palmer et al., 2015). Importantly, these factors become increasingly important with age and increasing social experience of groups, with age-related trends being identified across middle childhood to early adolescence (Palmer et al., 2015) and across early- to mid-adolescence (Mulvey et al., 2016). To date, research has focussed primarily on perspectives of majority-status participants. This study uniquely examined both minority- and majority-ethnic adolescents' prosocial, aggressive and passive bystander responses to an incident of verbal racism.

The first aim of this study was to examine how age and ethnic-group membership influence types of bystander response to an incident of bias-based bullying (verbal racism) in a diverse community in the UK. In line with recent research (Palmer et al., 2015), with age, ethnic-group membership is likely to become more important for bystander responses. We extend Mulvey et al., (2016) by examining two age groups within adolescence (a time that is particularly relevant for identity-development). In line with Mulvey et al., we predicted that prosocial intentions would decline with age. Additionally, minority-ethnic participants will be more likely to indicate prosocial bystander intentions, and less likely to report passive intentions (Palmer et al., 2015).

The second aim of this study was to examine whether cross-group friendships (a form of quality intergroup contact) influences minority and majority-ethnic adolescents' likelihood of engaging in different bystander responses. Research consistently shows how intergroup contact can reduce negative attitudes towards outgroup members through meaningful, positive interactions. Cross-group friendships are one of the most effective means of reducing prejudice among adults and children (e.g., Beelmann & Heinemann, 2014; Turner & Cameron, 2016), and recent research shows how having even one close cross-group friendship is beneficial in adolescence (Bagci, Rutland, Kumashiro, Smith & Blumberg, 2014; Graber, Turner & Madill, 2016). Moreover, recent research indicated that general intergroup contact predicts prosocial *bystander* intentions among White British adolescents (Abbott & Cameron, 2014).

The participants in the present study attended highly diverse schools in a diverse community. Therefore, the current study extends Abbott and Cameron (2014) by examining whether quality cross-group friendships can positively predict prosocial bystander responses *and* negatively predict aggressive and passive responses, among both minority- and majority-ethnic status adolescents. This is essential to fully understand how to target school-based

interventions to reduce racism among young people in diverse settings. In line with Abbott and Cameron (2014) we predicted that cross-group friendships would promote prosocial responses among majority-ethnic participants. It was not known how this would influence minority-ethnic bystander responses.

The third aim was to examine the protective role of ethnic socialisation (i.e., instilling pride in one's own ethnic-background, preparation for bias and responding to racism) on bystander responses. Research demonstrates the role parents play in shaping young people's intergroup attitudes (Degner & Delage, 2013; Gniewosz & Noack, 2015). Among minority-ethnic youth, ethnic socialisation has been shown to protect well-being and self-esteem, particularly when young people are faced with discrimination (Hughes, Bachman, Ruble & Fuligni, 2006; Iqbal, 2014). The current study extends this literature further to determine whether ethnic socialisation, via positive and negative messages about one's ethnic-identity and experiences of racism, predicted positive (prosocial) or negative (aggressive or passive) bystander responses to racism among minority-ethnic participants. We anticipate that positive messages will be associated with prosocial responses, and negative messages will be associated with aggressive or passive responses.

Method

Participants

Participants were adolescents from two age groups (*N*=555 younger adolescents, year 8: M_{age}=12.26 years; *N*=545 older adolescents, year 10: M_{age}=14.25 years) at six secondary schools (N=1100) from an ethnically diverse borough (65% White British, 2011 Census) near Birmingham, UK. For the purpose of analysis, participants were coded as majority-ethnic

(White British, 59.4%) or minority-ethnic (Black, Asian, Eastern European, or Dual/Multiple

Heritage, 40.6%[1]).

Design

A 2 (Age: Younger adolescence, Older adolescence) x 2 (Gender[2]: Male, Female) x 2

(Ethnic-group status: Majority, Minority) x 2 (Cross-group friendship: No outgroup friends,

One outgroup friend or more) between-participant-design, with bystander responses

(prosocial, aggressive, passive) to a hypothetical scenario of verbal racism as the dependent

variable. For minority-status participants only, positive and negative ethnic-socialisation

(continuous variables) were included as predictors of bystander responses in regression.

Procedure and Measures

Appropriate ethical procedures (including school, parent and participant consent and

debrief) were followed (BPS, 2014). Demographic information was collected in addition to

the measures below[3].

Cross-group friends. Participants indicated up to five close friends and later reported

those friends' ethnicities, if known (Jugert, Noack & Rutland, 2011). A dichotomous variable

was calculated to compare those with no quality close cross-group friends (N=370) to those

who indicated at least one quality cross-group friend (N=522).[4]

Ethnic socialisation (ES) was measured using 9 items based on the Familial Ethnic

Socialization Measure (FESM, e.g., Umana-Taylor & Fine, 2001). On a 1 (Never) to 3 (A lot)

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[1] Participants were asked to indicate their ethnic "ethnic/racial background". They received a definition and examples and provided an open-ended answer. Three hundred and thirty variations of ethnicity were presented. These were coded into the global categories presented here.

[2] There are no hypotheses regarding gender differences, and exploration is beyond the scope of the present paper, but gender was included in the analysis for transparency.

[3] Measures presented here formed part of a questionnaire delivered as part of a three-year collaborative project investigating racism amongst adolescents [Funder name/award number here].

[4] Some participants (N=208) did not indicate their friendship groups and were not included in this analysis. For ethnic-majority participants any friends from ethnic-minority groups were coded as cross-group. For ethnic-minority participants any friends from the ethnic-majority group were coded as cross-group.

response scale, 7 items measured positive parental preparation (e.g., Have your parents…ever talked to you about racism and what it is? α=.713) and 2 items measured negative parental preparation (e.g., Have your parents… ever told you to keep your distance from people of other ethnic/racial backgrounds? r=.53), resulting in two separate "ethnic socialisation" (ES) scores.

Bystander response. Based on interview data (Palmer & Cameron, 2010) and past research (Abbott & Cameron, 2014; Palmer et al., 2015), participants read a scenario of verbal racism between two fictional students. They then indicated how likely they would respond (1 = I wouldn't do this to 3 = I'd definitely do this) in seven different ways (see Table 1). Factor analysis indicated three broad responses: (1) Prosocial (25.32% of variance), (2) Aggressive (20.74%), (3) Passive (15.24%), (KMO=.603, Bartlett's test of sphericity p<.001). Thus, three mean bystander response scores were created for each participant.

Results

A repeated measures ANOVA showed a main effect of bystander response (F (2, 1538) = 173.53, p<.001, η^2=.18), with prosocial responses most commonly indicated (M=1.95, SE=.02), then passive (M=1.72, SE=.02), then aggressive (M=1.39, SE=.02), all comparison ps<.001. Effects within each type of responses are explored below[5].

Prosocial

Younger adolescents (M=2.07, SD=.58) were more likely to indicate prosocial responses compared to older (M=1.84, SD=.53), (F (1, 184) = 24.70, p<.001, η^2=.031). An ethnic status x gender interaction (F (1, 184) = 7.33, p<.007 η^2=.009) showed minority-ethnic girls reported the highest prosocial intentions (M=2.16, SE=.05), compared to majority-

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[5] Due to space, only gender interactions also involving ethnic-group status and/or cross-group friendships will be explored further within the analyses.

ethnic girls (*M*=2.04, SE=.05, *p*<.05), majority-ethnic boys (*M*=1.86, *SD*=.04), and minority-ethnic boys (*M*=1.75, *SD*=.05) (all *p*s<.001).

Multiple regression analyses on minority-status participant data only, showed that the regression model (positive ES and negative ES as predictors, prosocial bystander response as the outcome) significantly fits the data, $F (2, 340) = 10.156$, *p*<.001. Coefficients showed that positive ES positively predicted prosocial responses (B=.291, *t*=3.88, *p*<.001) and negative ES negatively predicted prosocial responses (B=-.229, *t*=-2.88, *p*=.004).

Aggressive

Older adolescents (*M*=1.4, *SD*=.56) reported higher aggressive intentions compared to younger (*M*=1.34, *SD*=.53), ($F (1, 184) = 5.61$, *p*=.018, η^2=.007). A cross-group friendship x age interaction ($F (1, 184) = 4.44$, *p*=.035, η^2=.006) showed that, for those with no quality cross-group friends, older adolescents reported higher aggressive responses (*M*=1.53, *SE*=.05) compared to younger (*M*=1.35, *SE*=.05), *p*=.009. When having at least one high quality cross-group friendship, no age differences were observed and aggressive responses were relatively low (younger *M*=1.35, *SE*=.03; older *M*=1.37, *SE*=.03), *p*=.75.

Multiple regression analyses showed that the regression model (positive ES and negative ES as predictors, aggressive bystander response as the outcome) significantly fits the data, $F (2, 336) = 7.02$, *p*=.001. Coefficients showed that negative ES positively predicted aggressive bystander responses (B=.229, *t*=4.52, *p*<.001). Positive ES did not predict aggressive bystander intentions, *p*=.923.

Passive

An age x ethnic-status interaction ($F (1, 184) = 11.38$, *p*<.001, η^2=.015) showed that among older adolescents only (*p*=.003), majority-ethnic participants indicated stronger

passive intentions (*M*=1.80, *SE*=.03) than minority-ethnic participants (*M*=1.62, *SE*=.05). Among younger adolescents only, no differences were observed when comparing majority- and minority-ethnic participants' passive responses (majority *M*=1.69, *SE*=.04; minority *M*=1.78, *SE*=.05, *p*=.111). For majority-ethnic participants' responses only, older adolescents had higher passive (*M*=1.80, *SE*=.05) scores than younger (*M*=1.69, *SE*=.04), *p*=.02. Whereas for minority-ethnic participants' passive scores, older participants had lower passive responses (*M*=1.62, *SE*=.05) than younger (*M*=1.78, *SE*=.05), *p*=.018. An age x gender interaction was observed (F (1, 184) = 8.42, *p*=.004, η^2=.011) and superseded by a higher order interaction between age x ethnic-status x gender (F (1, 184) = 4.803, *p*=.029, η^2=005). Comparisons across gender groups showed that for older minority-ethnic adolescents only (*p*=.01) girls reported higher passive intentions (*M*=1.75, *SD*=.07) compared to boys (*M*=1.48, *SD*=.08).

A further cross-group friend x gender interaction (F (1, 778) = 3.91, *p*=.048, η^2=.005) showed that for those with no quality cross-group friends only, girls (*M*=1.80, *SE*=.05) were significantly more likely to report passive intentions compared to boys (*M*=1.66, *SE*=.05, *p*=.033). Finally, multiple regression analyses showed that the regression model (positive ES and negative ES as predictors, passive bystander response as the outcome) was a non-significant fit for the data, F (2, 338) = 2.35, *p*=.097. Positive ES was non-significant (*p*=.57) but negative ES positively predicted passive bystander responses (B=.105, *t*=2.058, *p*=.04).

Discussion

Prosocial bystander responses were most commonly reported, then passive, then aggressive. This direction is in line with other cross-sectional data on bystander responses to general bullying (e.g., Trach, Hymel, Gregory & Waterhouse, 2011).

Based on recent research (Mulvey et al., 2016; Palmer et al., 2015) we examined the interactions between age and ethnic-group status on bystander responses. We observed a predicted decline in prosocial responses from younger to older adolescents, but also an increase in aggressive responses. For passive responses, older majority-ethnic adolescents were more likely to ignore than their younger counterparts but the opposite pattern was observed for younger minority-ethnic adolescents, who were more likely to report ignoring than older minority-ethnic adolescents. This suggests different motivations may underpin adolescents' likelihood of ignoring depending on their ethnic background, and at different stages of their school life. As suggested by recent research, it is possible that majority-ethnic adolescents take racist incidents less seriously as they get older, due to normalisation (Aboud & Joong, 2008; Mulvey et al., 2016) and therefore reduced perceived severity (e.g., Palmer et al., 2015), or concerns about peer-group related repercussions for challenging the incident (Mulvey et al., 2016). For minority-ethnic participants, increased experiences of racism (Palmer & Cameron, 2010) and increasing importance of ethnic-identity (Umana-Taylor et al., 2015) may drive the older minority adolescents' reduced passive responses. These motivations remain to be explored in future research.

Extending previous research on the value of intergroup contact (Abbott & Cameron, 2014), quality cross-group friendship was associated with a reduced likelihood of aggressive bystander intentions among older adolescents and lower ignoring intentions among girls, demonstrating that outgroup friendships can be beneficial for potentially reducing less desirable bystander responses, particularly among older adolescents. These findings add to recent research that emphasises the many positive outcomes for adolescents holding at least one high quality cross-group friendship (Bagci et al., 2014; Graber et al., 2016). In this sample, cross-group friendships did not influence prosocial responses; it is possible that diverse contexts provide a range of challenges that mean that overt challenging of an incident

might be risky. Future research should examine this further, also including a measure of reciprocated cross-group friendships (e.g., Jugert et al, 2011).

In line with this suggestion, promoting pride in one's ethnic background could encourage minority-ethnic adolescents to challenge racist incidents in school. Ethnic socialisation was important for each type of bystander response among minority-ethnic participants. This novel finding showed, as hypothesised, that positive messages predicted higher prosocial intentions and lower passive intentions, and negative messages predicted lower prosocial intentions and higher aggressive intentions. These findings extend previous research on predictors of bystander responses by demonstrating the implications of positive and negative ethnic socialisation on *bystander responses* to racism.

This study demonstrated the importance of examining intergroup processes in ethnically-diverse bullying contexts (Evans et al., 2014). Evidently, minority- and majority-ethnic status adolescents face different challenges and motivations when faced with racist incidents. The present study reiterates the importance of acknowledging relative group affiliations, encouraging meaningful cross-group friendships, and ethnic socialisation for minority-ethnic adolescents, and exploring further the age-related decline in bystander responses to bias-based bullying.

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ADOLESCENT BYSTANDERS AND RACISM IN SCHOOL 16

Table 1. Bystander response items

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(1) Prosocial	I would tell a teacher or member of staff what the person had said; I would tell the person they should not be saying nasty things about someone else's ethnic/racial background; I would tell a member of my family what the person had said
(2) Aggressive	I would start a fight with the person who said something nasty, immediately or later on; I would call the bully something nasty, to do with their ethnic/racial background
(3) Passive	I would ignore it and walk away; I wouldn't get involved but I would watch

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