The Correlates and Predictors of Pro-Social Attitudes & Behaviour: Do They Apply to Bystander Anti-Racism on Behalf of Indigenous Australians?

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution.

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Yara Frias Neto
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Abstract

The present study explored whether a number of variables previously shown to correlate with or predict pro-social attitudes and behaviours could be applied specifically to bystander anti-racism on behalf of Indigenous Australians. 150 participants completed an online survey which included questions pertaining to socio-demographic and social-psychological variables. Participants were also asked to indicate how likely they were to engage in bystander anti-racism in response to a low risk and a high risk discrimination scenario. Next they were asked to indicate their level of fear and anger in response to each scenario. The results indicate that the variables related to action intentions differ according to the level of risk inherent in a given situation. Being older and having higher levels of empathic concern toward Indigenous Australians predicted the intention to engage in bystander anti-racism when intervention involved a low level of risk, while being older (alone) predicted the intention to engage when intervention involved a high level of risk. It is suggested that those who are older may be more likely to engage in bystander anti-racism because they feel more competent in their ability to effectively intervene.
Disadvantage on the basis of race is pervasive (Harris et al., 2006; Henry, Houston, & Mooney, 2004; Larson, Gilles, Howard, & Coffin, 2007; Paradies, 2006; Paradies, Harris, & Anderson, 2008; Williams et al., 2008). In Australia, Indigenous Australians have been marginalised since the arrival of the first fleet in 1788 (Bourke & Cox, 1994) and continue to face social and institutionalised racial discrimination (Henry et al., 2004; Mooney, 2003). To clarify, racism can be defined as “that which maintains or exacerbates inequality of opportunity among ethnoracial groups. Racism can be expressed through stereotypes (racist beliefs), prejudice (racist emotions/affect) or discrimination (racist behaviours and practices)” (Berman & Paradies, 2010, p. 4).

For Indigenous Australians, the effects of racial discrimination can be seen in a variety of outcomes, including poor levels of educational attainment (Australian Bureau of Statistics, ABS, 2008), reduced earning capacity (ABS, 2006a), difficulties with housing (Beresford, 2001), inferior quality of health care (Henry et al., 2004), over representation within the prison system (ABS, 2009), and significantly lower life expectancy than non-Indigenous Australians (ABS, 2006b). Discrimination also significantly impairs of the physical and psychological well being of Indigenous Australians (Larson et al., 2007; Paradies et al., 2008), with some responding to racial discrimination by withdrawing from society, engaging in drug and alcohol use, and by internalising racism (Mellor, 2004). Clearly, there is a great need to establish equality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, with a focus on putting an end to racism and discrimination.