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It’s Always Good to Help When Possible But…: Obstacles to Bystander Anti-prejudice

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Abstract
Bystander action is an important strategy in combating prejudice and discrimination against minority groups. Seven factors likely to influence intention to act when witnessing prejudice/discrimination were examined among 150 Australian community participants in relation to two scenarios about refugees. One involved a confrontation on a train (high risk) and the other involved hearing a prejudicial joke (low risk). Fear of reprisal was the most significant obstacle to intervention in the high risk scenario and the perception that the incident was not serious enough was the most significant obstacle in the low-risk scenario. As expected, participants indicated an increased likelihood of acting in the low-risk compared to the high-risk scenario.

Keywords: Bystander Anti-Prejudice, Refugees, Prejudice, Discrimination
With prejudice against refugees a long-standing problem in Australia (Davidson, Murray, & Schweitzer, 2008), the issue has attracted considerable negative attention from the public in recent years. In both the media and public discourse, refugees are portrayed as a threat to employment and housing and are often associated with criminality (Kosic, Phalet & Mannetti, 2012) and terrorism (Colic-Peisker, 2005). As such, many Australians fear that refugees claiming residency in the community will endanger their security and way of life (Pedersen, Watt & Hansen, 2006).

**Contextual Information**

Australia accepts around 13,750 refugees annually, and is ranked third in the world in terms of its resettlement commitment (Fozdar & Hartley, 2012). In 2012, however, Australia was also ranked number 49 of the major refugee hosting countries (Refugee Council of Australia, 2013). Further research has suggested that in the last decade Australia has seen a retreat from multicultural ideals and is instead adopting xenophobic tendencies (e.g. Tate, 2009). Overcoming prejudice in the Australian community is thus a significant obstacle that Australian refugees face.

**Bystander Anti-prejudice**

A potentially important and under-researched strategy in combating such prejudice/discrimination is bystander anti-prejudice, defined as action taken in response to incidences of
prejudice when not directly involved (Nelson, Dunn & Paradies, 2011). Our study examines quantitatively, for the first time, the full range of potential enablers and obstacles to bystander action identified by Nelson et al. (2010).

Prejudice is a significant obstacle to bystander action and is defined as a negative evaluation toward an ‘out-group’ (Czopp, Monteith & Mark, 2006). Several studies have found that prejudice can lower the intention to engage in bystander anti-prejudice (e.g., Gaertner, Dovidio & Johnson, 1982; Saucier, Miller & Doucet, 2005) with high-prejudiced participants being less likely to reprimand prejudiced commentators (Dickter & Newton, 2013). A second obstacle involves interpersonal relationships and the need to maintain, and/or avoid the dissolution, of these (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). This factor has been identified as a significant justification for inaction in a prejudice situation (e.g., Scully & Rowe, 2009). A related factor associated with preserving interpersonal relationships is impression management (Hyers, 2007), defined as the deliberate attempt to alter a response in order to create a
favourable impression of oneself with others (Barrick & Mount, 1996).

A further reason for not engaging in bystander action is the perceived risk to the bystander that the perpetrator may turn on them (Sandstrom & Bartini, 2010). Some studies have found that perpetrator’s feelings of shame that arise from being confronted may turn into anger directed at an active bystander and result in a violent or aggressive situation (Baumeister & Campbell, 1999). Conversely, research has shown that in situations with a low potential for danger, individuals are more likely to engage in helping behaviour (Fischer, Greitemeyer, Pollozek & Frey, 2006). An additional obstacle to bystander anti-prejudice is the evaluation that an incident is not serious enough to warrant action (Nelson, et al., 2011). These situations may include prejudiced jokes or stereotypes (Nelson, et al., 2011) as well as verbal threats and certain levels of non-violent aggression (Gracia, Garcia, & Lila, 2009). Similarly, research has shown that when witnessing a prejudiced situation, bystanders will actively minimise reports of harm or severity, thereby warranting their inaction (Aboud & Joong, 2008). This is especially likely when the target of prejudice is
perceived to be a member of an ‘out-group’ (Nelson et al., 2010). The implication is that bystander anti-prejudice will be severely restricted if the situation is deemed minor or trivial, and even more so when the target to prejudice is not someone the bystander identifies with.

Another significant obstacle identified by Nelson et al. (2010) was the perception that action would be ineffective. In real-life situations, bystanders may be inhibited by the perception that any intervention they undertake will be unsuccessful (e.g., Aboud and Joong, 2008; Dickter & Newton, 2013). The view that it isn’t an individual’s role or place to intervene in a prejudiced situation is another obstacle to bystander anti-prejudice. In many situations where bystanders are present, inaction has been attributed to a lack of personal responsibility (Bowes-Sperry & O’Leary-Kelly, 2005). Evaluating an incident as ‘none of my business’ makes bystander action less likely (Gracia, Garcia & Lila, 2008). Finally, the view that everyone is entitled to their own opinion, at times termed anti-political correctness (Nelson et al., 2010), is a potential obstacle to bystander action. While there has been little research on this
issue, freedom of speech is often used as a rationale for bystander inaction (Witenberg, 2007).

The Present Study.
This was a study aimed at identifying the variables that most strongly influence bystander anti-prejudice in both a high- and low-risk situations. Each of the seven factors discussed above acted as the predictor variables (PVs) with intention to act as the dependent variable (DV). It was hypothesised that, consistent with previous research, participants would indicate a higher intention to act in the low-risk scenario (e.g. Fischer, et al., 2006).

Method

Participants
A total of 150 participants were recruited via the Social and Community On-Line Research Database (SCORED) in Perth, Western Australia. Participants were aged between 21 and 84 years with a mean age of 45. Just over half the participants (58%) were female. Approximately one-third of the participants (34%) had ‘somewhat left’ political leanings followed by ‘somewhat right’ at 22%. Most participants had, or were in the
process of completing, a bachelor degree (47%), while 35% were completing a higher degree. Most participants were Caucasian/European (90%); most (56%) indicated no religion, and 35% were Christian.

Measures

Demographics

Participants were asked a series of questions relating to their demographics. Participants stated their age in years, their gender (1 = female, 2 = male), their ethnic background (1 = Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander, 2 = African, 3 = Asian, 4 = Caucasian/European, 5 = Indian, 6 = Middle Eastern, 7 = Pacific Islanders, or Other), their religion (1 = Buddhist, 2 = Christian, 3 = Hindu, 4 = Jewish, 5 = Muslim, 6 = No Religion, or Other), education level (1 = did not complete secondary school through to 6 = higher degree) and their political preference (1 = strongly left through to 5 = strongly right, or 6 = don’t care).
This six-item semantic-differential scale, adapted from Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe and Ropp (1997) was used to measure prejudice towards refugees. Participants indicated on a Likert scale ranging from 0 to 100 how they felt about refugees in general across five different conditions; for example, ‘negative-positive’. After appropriate recoding of the questions, higher scores indicated higher prejudice.

**Scenarios**

Two different prejudiced scenarios were given; one a high-risk and one a low-risk situation. The high-risk situation involved the possibility of a confrontation with an aggressive man on a train and the low-risk situation involved a male acquaintance telling an offensive joke at a party. Participants indicated how likely it was that they would intervene using a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 being very likely and 5 being very unlikely. After appropriate recoding, higher scores indicated higher intention to act. Participants were then asked a series of questions relating to each predictor variable, indicating their agreement or disagreement on how likely it was that this PV would influence their intention to act. Each of these questions was answered
according to a 7-point Likert scale. All items were adapted from Pennay and Paradies (2011) with half of the items being reverse coded. An outline of each variable, including examples of items, is detailed below.

**Risk/Fear of Reprisal**

In the high-risk scenario there were five questions for this variable (e.g., “I wouldn’t do anything because there is a risk the man could physically harm me”). Three of the five items were reverse coded. In the low-risk scenario there were four items, the fifth being removed because it was deemed irrelevant to the context (“I would report the situation to the police or other agency when I returned home”). All other items remained the same. Two of the four questions for this scenario were reverse coded.

**Intervention Ineffective**

There were four items for this variable in both the high-risk and low-risk scenario (e.g., “I wouldn’t do anything because people usually don’t listen to a different point of view”). Two of the four statements were reverse coded.
**Desire to Preserve Interpersonal Relationships**

In the high-risk scenario there were five items in this scale (e.g., “I wouldn’t do anything because it would be too embarrassing”). Three of the five items were reverse coded. In the low-risk scenario all questions remained the same bar the last item which was removed, once again, because it was deemed irrelevant to the context (“if somebody else acted first, I would publicly support them”). Of the four items remaining, two were reverse coded.

**Incident Not Serious Enough**

In the high risk scenario there were four items, two of which were reverse coded (e.g., “I wouldn’t take action because the situation is too minor to do anything about”). In the low-risk scenario an additional two items were added. These included: “I wouldn’t do anything as it’s just a joke and he wasn’t attacking anybody directly” and “I would act because even though it seems like humour, words can hurt”. Of the six items for the low-risk scenario, three were reverse coded.

**Not My Role/Place**
Both scenarios had four items, two were reverse coded (e.g., “I wouldn’t take action because it’s none of my business”).

**Entitled to Own Opinion.**

There were four items for each scenario, two of which were reverse coded (e.g., “I would not do anything because Australia is a free country and people have the right to say what they want”).

After appropriate recoding of the questions, higher scores indicated greater intention to act.

**Procedure**

Once the survey was finalised, participants were recruited through the SCORED administrator via email during one week in July 2012.
Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for each scale. Reliability for all scales was satisfactory. For all scales, the mean scores were above the midpoint.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics Including Means (M), Standard Deviations (SD), Range of Scores, Number of Items and Cronbach’s Alpha (α)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M/SD</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Number of items</th>
<th>α</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Intention to act</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Risk</td>
<td>3.74 (1.19)</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Risk</td>
<td>3.10 (1.19)</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Risk</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Risk</td>
<td>4.55 (1.40)</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Risk</td>
<td>5.03 (1.10)</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ineffective</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Risk</td>
<td>4.98 (1.44)</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Risk</td>
<td>4.66 (1.31)</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.78</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Impression management</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Risk</td>
<td>5.48 (1.16)</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Risk</td>
<td>4.91 (1.33)</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.85</td>
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<td><strong>Seriousness</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Risk</td>
<td>5.18 (1.24)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low Risk</td>
<td>3.96 (1.56)</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.95</td>
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<tr>
<td>High Risk</td>
<td>5.28 (1.28)</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Risk</td>
<td>4.75 (1.33)</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.90</td>
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<td><strong>Right to own Opinion</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Risk</td>
<td>5.27 (1.16)</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Risk</td>
<td>4.71 (1.30)</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prejudice</td>
<td>35.66 (2.06)</td>
<td>0-100</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Difference in Intention to Act in High and Low Risk Scenarios
A paired samples t-test was used to compare mean scores for intention to act for the high and low risk scenarios. On average, participants’ intention to act scores for the low risk scenario were 0.63 points higher than their scores for their intention to act in the high risk scenario, 95% CI (0.43, 0.84). This difference was statistically significant, $t(152) = 6.1$, $p < .001$ indicating that participants were more likely to act in the low-risk scenario.

**Correlations Among the Predictor Variables**

Intention to act was significantly correlated with each of the predictor variables for both the high- and low-risk scenarios at $p < .05$ or lower. The only demographic variables, however, that correlated with intention to act were age and political standpoint. Specifically, older participants indicated that they were more likely to act and participants with a strongly right-wing political standpoint were less likely to act in both scenarios. Intention to act was also negatively correlated with prejudice. Participants who scored high on the prejudice scale were less likely to engage in bystander action for both scenarios.

**Prediction of Intention to Act**

To determine the most significant predictors of intention to act, two hierarchical multiple regression equations were employed. One examined the predictors of intention to act in a high-risk situation and the other examined predictors of intention to act in a low-risk situation. As two socio-demographic variables—age and political preference—were significantly correlated with intention to act, they were entered into the regression
equation on Step 1. Following this, Prejudice was entered into the regression equation on Step 2. Risk/Fear of Reprisal, Intervention Ineffective, Intervention Not Serious Enough, Desire to Preserve Interpersonal Relationships, Not My Role/Place and Entitled to Own Opinion were added on Step 3. With respect to both regressions, there were high correlations between the predictor variables. However, despite this, multicollinearity was not evident.

In Step 1 of the high-risk scenario regression model, age and political standpoint collectively accounted for a statistically significant 12% of the variability in intention to act, $R^2$ change $= .12$, $F(2, 143) = 9.376, p < .001$. At Step 2 prejudice accounted for an additional 10% of variability in intention to act, above and beyond that already accounted for by age and political standpoint. This incremental increase in $R^2$ change at Step 2 was statistically significant $\Delta F(1, 142) = 18.09, p < .001$. At Step 3 of the regression model, Risk/Fear of Reprisal, Impression Management/Interpersonal Relationships, Intervention Ineffective, Incident Not Serious Enough, Not My Role/Place and Entitled to Own Opinion were added. These variables accounted for an additional significant 55% of variability in intention to act, $R^2$ change $= .55$, $\Delta F(6, 136) = 54.88, p < .001$. In combination, the nine predictor variables accounted for a statistically significant proportion of variance in intention to act, $F(9, 136) = 50.82, p < .001$.

In Step one, both political preference and age were statistically significant $t(142) = -3.70, p < .001; t(142) = 1.98, p = .05$. At the end of Step 2 both demographic factors remained significant, $t(142) = -2.50, p = .01; t(142) = 2.04, p = .01$. Prejudice also significantly predicted
participants intention to act $t(142) = -4.25, p < .001$. When all nine variables were combined in Step 3, Risk/Fear of Reprisal, Intervention Ineffective and Interpersonal Relationships emerged as explaining a significant proportion of unique variance in a participants intention to act in a high-risk scenario; $t(142) = 5.73, p < .001$; $t(142) = 3.46, p < .001$; $t(142) = 3.16, p < .01$ (see Table 2).
Table 2: Hierarchical Multiple Regressions Predicting Intention to Act/Bystander Action in a High-risk Scenario.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$R$</th>
<th>$\beta^a$</th>
<th>$\beta^b$</th>
<th>$\beta^c$</th>
<th>$R^2$ change</th>
<th>Total $R^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>-.07</td>
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<td>Political Standpoint</td>
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<td>.29**</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td>.16*</td>
<td>.15*</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.10*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prejudice</td>
<td>.38**</td>
<td>.33**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Step 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.73*</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impression</td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Risk/Fear</td>
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<td>Seriousness</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.56*</td>
<td>.78*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** = Correlation significant at .01 * = Correlation significant at .05 $^a$ denotes beta weights obtained on step 1 of the regression; $^b$ denotes beta weights obtained on step 2 of the regression; $^c$ denotes beta weights obtained on step 3 of the regression.

In step one of the regression model for the low risk scenario the predictor variables age and political standpoint collectively accounted for a
statistically significant 12% of the variability in intention to act, $R^2$ change = 0.12, $F(2, 143) = 9.38, p < .001$. When Prejudice was entered into the regression model on Step 2 this variable accounted for an additional significant 10% of variability in intention to act, above and beyond that already accounted for by age and political standpoint, $R^2$ change = 0.10, $\Delta F(1, 142) = 18.09, p < .001$. When each of the other predictor variables were entered into the regression model at Step 3, these variables accounted for an additional significant 22%, $R^2$ change = 0.22, $\Delta F(6, 136) = 8.76, p < .001$. The nine variables collectively accounted for a statistically significant proportion of variance in intention to act, $F(9, 136) = 11.61, p < .001$.

In Step 1 of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis, both political preference and age were statistically significant, $t(142) = -3.70, p < .001; t(142) = 1.98, p = .05$. At the end of Step 2, both age and political standpoint remained significant at $t(142) = 2.04, p = .04; t(142) = -2.50, p = .01$. Prejudice was also a significant predictor for intention to act, $t(142) = -4.99, p < .001$. When all nine variables were combined in Step 3, Age, Prejudice, Risk, Incident Not Serious Enough and Not My Role/Place emerged as the strongest predictor variables capable of explaining a significant proportion of unique variance in a participants intention to act in a low risk situation, $t(142) = 2.64, p < .01, t(142) = -2.23, p < .05, t(142) = 2.19, p < .05, t(142) = -3.88, p < .001; t(142) = 2.15, p < .05$ (see Table 3).
Table 3: Hierarchical Multiple Regressions Predicting Intention to Act/Bystander Action in a Low-risk Scenario

** = Correlation significant at .01    * = Correlation significant at .05  

* denotes beta weights obtained on step 1 of the regression;  
^ denotes beta weights obtained on step 2 of the regression;  
⁄ denotes beta weights obtained on step 3 of the regression.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>r</th>
<th>β^a</th>
<th>β^b</th>
<th>β^c</th>
<th>$R^2$ change</th>
<th>Total $R^2$</th>
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<td>-.29**</td>
<td>-.20*</td>
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<td>Age</td>
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<td>.15*</td>
<td>.18**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prejudice</td>
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<td>-.33**</td>
<td>-.17*</td>
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<td>Seriousness</td>
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<td>.22**</td>
<td>.44**</td>
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</table>

Discussion
Our study examined the factors that most strongly impacted on a participant’s intention to engage in bystander anti-prejudice as identified in the review by Nelson et al. (2010). The primary aim of the present study
was to determine which variables were the most significant obstacles to intention to act in both a high- and low-risk situation.

In both scenarios, only two socio-demographic variables were significantly correlated with intention to act. Participants who identified with a right-wing political standpoint were less likely to indicate that they would act. This finding is consistent with literature suggesting that individuals with right-wing values are significantly more likely to hold prejudiced views (Pedersen & Hartley, 2012). Age was the only other socio-demographic variable that was significantly correlated with intention to act, with older respondents more likely to indicate action in line with Neto and Pedersen (2013).

**Multiple Regression Analysis**

In the high-risk scenario, Risk/Fear of Reprisal was one of the strongest obstacles to intention to act. The higher the level of risk or fear of reprisal, the less likely it is that a bystander will take action because the danger to the bystander will outweigh the benefits of any helping behaviour (Karakashian, et al., 2006).

Results also indicated that in the low-risk scenario, the incident not being serious enough to warrant response was the major obstacle to intention to act. Prejudiced jokes or ‘light-hearted’ comments are often evaluated as too insignificant to warrant an assertive response and are usually ignored at best or endorsed at worst (Nelson, et al., 2010).

Consistent with past research, Entitled to Own Opinion was a significant obstacle to intention to act in the low-risk scenario only. Witenberg (2007)
found, for example, that ‘freedom of speech’ or ‘right to own opinion’ was presented as a major obstacle to engaging in anti-prejudice strategies. Intervention Ineffective was identified as a significant obstacle in the high-risk scenario only. This finding is, in part, supported by real-life research that suggests participants are less likely to confront prejudice if they feel that action will make little or no difference (Dickter & Newton, 2013). Similarly, the belief that action would be ineffective, or pointless, was a significant barrier for children to intervene in a bullying situation (Aboud & Joong, 2008).

Not My Role/Place was found to be a significant obstacle in the low-risk scenario. Past research has indicated that in many situations where bystanders are present, lack of personal responsibility has played an influential role in a lack of action (Bowes-Sperry & O’Leary-Kelly, 2005). In the present study, this perceived diffusion of responsibility may have resulted in participants adopting a frame of mind that suggested the incidence was ‘none of their business’ and thus not their place to intervene.

Both Intervention Ineffective and Not My Role/Place may be related to a participant’s confidence in speaking out. Confidence, and perception of skill or ability in speaking out, have both been identified as important strategies in combating prejudice. Providing bystanders with these skills, and educating them about the value and importance of confrontation, should contribute to the enabling of bystander anti-prejudice (Dunn, 2013).

Desire to Preserve Interpersonal Relationships was a particularly significant obstacle in the high-risk scenario. Dickter and Newton (2013) similarly attributed low levels of confrontation to fear of potentially negative
social consequences, such as being disliked or retaliated against. Contrary to expectations, however, in the current study this variable was not significant in the low-risk scenario despite research suggesting that this variable is a major obstacle to bystander anti-prejudice in any situation (Nelson, et al., 2010). Alternatively, this finding is consistent with some research indicating it is especially difficult to speak out in front of strangers in a public setting rather than friends or family or small groups of acquaintances (e.g. Hyers, 2007).

The differences in each scenario result in implications for bystander training. Because of these discrepancies, different factors may need to be addressed in order for bystander anti-prejudice to be effective, depending on the situation in question. Banyard (2008) suggests training bystanders in the specific type of situation in which they may be required to act.

**Hypothesis 1: Higher Intention to Act in the Low-risk Scenario**
Results supported the hypothesis that participants would report a higher intention to act in the low-risk scenario. This finding is consistent with research showing that the riskier or more dangerous a situation is, the less likely bystander intervention becomes. For example, Dickter and Newton (2013) found that stronger bystander action was taken in more private settings as potential social costs of intervening were minimised. As suggested by Fischer et al. (2006) in a high-risk scenario, it may be that the costs, including social costs, of helping a refugee outweigh the reward of helping, and the likelihood of bystander anti-prejudice is therefore lessened.
Practical Implications

This study found several significant obstacles to bystander anti-prejudice that should be targeted in a community setting in order to foster bystander intervention. Each one has the potential to restrict helping behaviour; however, it has been suggested that many of the obstacles identified in this study, and in other bystander research, can be overcome through appropriate training (Scully & Rowe, 2009). This may involve observing and practising bystander behaviour, training in the specific type of situation in which a bystander may be required to act (Banyard, 2008) as well as dispelling myths that action is ineffective (Nelson, et al., 2010). When the individual becomes better informed on issues pertinent to bystander action and prejudice, confidence in their own action will be increased and desired outcomes may be effectively achieved (Ajzen, Joyce, Sheikh & Cote, 2011).

Studies have shown that changes in behaviour can lead to changes in attitudes which then modify future behaviours (Pedersen, Walker & Wise, 2005). Bystander action has the potential to change public behaviour and community attitudes by demonstrating an intolerance of prejudice, thus potentially changing subsequent acts of prejudice and discrimination, and even influencing attitudes through social norms (Czopp, et al., 2006). People who are highly prejudiced are more likely to significantly overestimate the extent of community consensus for their views, and are therefore more forthright in their opinions and less likely to compromise or change their stance (Watt & Larkin, 2010). By being more forthright and vocal in prejudiced views, social norms are more likely to be pushed toward discrimination and prejudice (Miller, 1993). However, if bystanders speak up
against incidences of discrimination then these incidences may be reduced as false consensus effects are diluted (Pedersen, Walker, et al., 2011). Bystanders who take action are, additionally, more likely to report positive feelings of satisfaction compared to those who don’t act (Nelson, et al., 2010). Similarly, victims of prejudice and discrimination are more likely to report positive effects on their sense of belonging and acceptance when someone intervenes on their behalf (Scully & Rowe, 2009). These practical implications and benefits of bystander action make it an important area of further study. Knowing what factors prevent bystander action is a starting point in identifying ways to overcome these barriers.

**Limitations**

Whilst the current study identified several significant obstacles to bystander anti-prejudice there are limitations that need to be addressed. The first of these is that the method of this study took the form of a self-report questionnaire and as such may not accurately reflect ‘real-life’. There has, however, been research that did focus on real-life situations and that found similar results to our own (e.g. Dickter & Newton, 2013). A further limitation may be that the majority of the sample had, or were in the process of, completing tertiary education, and hence may not be entirely representative of the overall population. Similarly, research has suggested that prejudice and education share a negative correlation (Pedersen, Beven, Walker, & Griffiths, 2004) and further research with a less educated sample would be beneficial.
Conclusion

Prejudice/discrimination against refugees has been a significant and ongoing problem within the Australian community for well over a decade, and is likely to continue unabated for some time (Davidson, et al., 2008). Devising strategies and policies that reduce the incidence of prejudice/discrimination against this group is warranted. It is hoped that this study has, in some way, contributed to understanding bystander anti-prejudice as an important approach in combating prejudice/discrimination against minority groups.
References


