Psychosocial predictors of anti-racist bystander action towards Indigenous Australians

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Abstract

Racism towards Indigenous people remains a social problem in Australian culture and racial abuse is part of that social problem. In this research, we investigated whether internal and external motivations, being open-minded and having racist attitudes predicted the intention to engage in bystander action in support of Indigenous Australians in situations deemed low- and high-risk to personal safety. A total of 168 non-Indigenous community participants completed an anonymous online survey in Perth, Western Australia. In the low-risk scenario, low levels of racism, high internal motivation and openness predicted the intention to engage in bystander action. In the high-risk scenario, participants with lower levels of racism and being female were more likely to engage in bystander action in support of Indigenous Australians. Coupled with previous research in the field, our findings suggest that internalised values relating to antiracist sentiments are significant predictors of antiracist bystander action.
Introduction

Racism towards Indigenous Australians has a long history and remains an unfortunate part of everyday life (Babacan & Hollinsworth, 2009). Racism towards Indigenous Australians has occurred since colonisation (Bourke & Cox, 1994) and generations of structural oppression and discrimination have produced disadvantage and negative biopsychosocial outcomes. For example, racism towards Indigenous Australians can be linked, in part, to poorer medical outcomes and life expectancy (Paradies, Harris, & Anderson, 2008) and psychological distress and substance misuse (Priest, Paradies, Stevens, & Bailie, 2012; Priest, Paradies, Gunthrope et al., 2011; Mellor, 2004). Moreover, as the Australian Human Rights Commission (2008) note, Indigenous Australians continue to have higher rates of incarceration and unemployment, poorer educational outcomes, and housing problems. While racism towards Indigenous Australians remains linked to institutional practices, it is also evident in everyday discourse and speech acts (Augoustinos & Every, 2009) and as argued by Christie, Tint, Wagner & Winter (2008), the different forms of oppression are directly related.
Racism directed at Indigenous Australians

Racism may be theorised as a set of discursive practices that are historically and culturally specific to region and nations. The terms “ingroup” and “outgroup” are used for studying racism in a variety of social contexts (Hall, 2012). Ingroup and outgroup membership is specific to social context and discursive practices. Ingroup and outgroup membership is a form of identity politics, as specific culturally meaningful traits (profession, religion, gender, race) are the basis for membership and exclusion. Ingroup and outgroup membership may be politically driven, and outgroup membership is often associated with social disadvantage (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Schiffhauer, 2007). Racism has been described 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). While racist speech acts are prejudicial ways of speaking and acting emerging from specific social interactions, as a discursive practice, racism is also a form of power and knowledge emerging from the complex histories of institutions, economic and social practices and patterns of behaviour (Van Dijk, 1990). Viewing racism as the microcosm of individual speech acts and behaviours and a larger set of historically specific discursive practices integrates social cognition and discourse theory (Van Dijk, 1990) and also supports one of the premises of peace psychology (Christie et al., 2006). As such, in this present research, racism is defined attitudinally and as a discursive practice.

In Australian society, Indigenous people constitute a minority outgroup often targeted by racism (Pedersen, Walker, Paradies, & Guerin, 2011). Verbal racism towards Indigenous Australians has been recently highlighted in the media due to a
high profile public figure. Adam Goodes, an Australian Football League (AFL) player with the Sydney Swans Football Club, has been subjected to a series of racial taunts. During the AFL’s 2013 Indigenous Round - “a celebration of our country’s Indigenous culture and players that have shaped Australia's Game” (AFL, 2013) - a 13-year-old female spectator racially abused Goodes during a game against the Collingwood Football Club. After Goodes’ remonstration with the spectator, security staff evicted the girl from the ground; he was left visibly upset and left the field for the remainder of the game. In subsequent days, the spectator apologised to Goodes and she reported being genuinely unaware that calling an Indigenous Australian a “gorilla” constituted a racist slur (Windley, 2013, May 25). This event escalated the following week due to racist remarks made by the President of the Collingwood Football Club, Eddie McGuire, towards Goodes. McGuire, who had officially apologised to Goodes and the Sydney Swans Football Club for the spectator’s racist comments the previous week, then reiterated this racial slur while hosting the Triple M “Hot breakfast show”. McGuire had “jokingly” suggested that Goodes might be a good candidate to market the upcoming musical production *King Kong*. Tim Darcy, his co-host, responded by saying, “No I wouldn't have thought so. Absolutely not” (Aaro, 2013, May 28). McGuire then attempted to retract his statement by indicating that he had made a “gaffe” and had had a “brain fade”.

Both incidents demonstrate the complexity of racism towards Indigenous Australians. On the one hand, people who reportedly do not know better inadvertently espouse racial epithets, while those who seemingly *do* know better essentially can do the same thing. Investigations related to the outward expression of racism have been a vital and recurrent theme in the literature. Equally relevant to racism discussions is the
investigation of which factors contribute to the decision for individuals to speak up against racism in the public sphere.

**Bystander action and racism**

The response of bystanders to significant social events such as racism is an important area of research in psychology. In our paper, we look at the issue of bystander action and racism against Indigenous Australians within the lens of peaceful management of conflict; in particular, ‘peacekeeping’ which is responding to an acute situation to contain violence. Having said that, the issue also relates to other forms of peace activities such as peacebuilding which involve reducing structural violence (see Christie, 2006; Galtung, 1975). In our previous example, Darcy’s response to McGuire’s racist comments (to the comparison between Goodes and King Kong) shows him speaking out against the racist comments by explicitly and firmly saying, “No…absolutely not”. This response, referred to by social scientists’ as “bystander antiracist action” (Nelson, Dunn, & Paradies, 2011) constitutes a form of pro-social behaviour that may have the capacity to alter harmful racist discursive practices. In social psychology, extensive research has been undertaken on inhibitory and passive individual responses to certain social events (Darley & Latane, 1970). Bystander inaction occurs when individuals fail to assist another person in obvious distress. For example, extensive research on the “bystander effect” and “diffusion of responsibility” repeatedly demonstrate that individuals are less likely to act to assist others in distress when they are: 1) in larger groups, 2) anonymous, and 3) where there is no group membership (Darley & Latane, 1968; Levine & Crowther, 2008). In contrast, bystander action is characterised by an individual’s active, helping and pro-social behaviour. Bystander action is a significant area of research in violence against women (Powell, 2011), racism (Russell, Pennay, Webster, & Paradies, 2013),
and other fields in the social sciences (Garcia, Weaver, Darley, & Spence, 2009; Levine & Crowther, 2008). Bystander action refers to individuals acting in interpersonal situations in a manner that influences social processes and potentially, social norms. Bystander action has become a vital component of antiracist research as evidence suggests that overt racism may be combated through individuals actively speaking up against racist views (Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Czopp, Monteith, & Mark, 2006; Nelson et al., 2011; Pedersen, Paradies, Hartley, & Dunn, 2011).

Bystander action is focused on individual responses to public displays of racism, particularly towards perceived outgroups (Nelson et al., 2011; Pedersen, Paradies et al., 2011; Slaby, 1999; Webb, 1998). Antiracist bystander action refers to individual actions directed against perpetrators of interpersonal racism (Nelson et al., 2011). It has been defined as:

action taken by a person or persons (not directly involved as a target or perpetrator) to speak out about or to seek to engage others in responding (either directly or indirectly, immediately or at a later time) against interpersonal or systemic racism (2011, p. 265).

As a form of antiracism, the act of speaking up in social situations provides a potentially effective mechanism for combating the harmful effects of racism. Racism is associated with a range of negative social outcomes. For example, it has been argued that witnessing racial harassment may be nearly as harmful as being the target of such harassment (Chrobot-Mason, Ragins, & Linnehan, 2013) and witnessing racism at work relates to deleterious wellbeing for the witness (Low, Radhakrishnan, Schneider, & Rounds, 2007). Furthermore, poor medical and mental health is linked to individuals targeted by racism (Brondolo, Brady ver Halen, Pencille, Beatty, & Contrada, 2009). Bystander action constitutes a useful response to day-to-day racism.
as it has the potential to create pro-social norms that reduce the frequency of inter-personal racism. As racist individuals are more likely to believe that their views are consensually shared (Pedersen, Griffiths & Watt, 2008), and are more likely to speak out (Miller, 1993), bystander action provides one avenue for reducing some negative outcomes associated with racism. Moreover, individuals engaging in bystander action have experienced benefits linked to higher levels of personal satisfaction (Hyers, 2007). Perhaps most importantly, bystander action has the capacity to challenge racism in situ in a manner that may have enduring social effects in particular, in the development of pro-social behaviour and the establishment of implicit and explicit antiracist social norms (Pedersen, Griffiths & Watt, 2008).

Researchers have suggested that bystander action is a largely untapped component of antiracist policies. There are several reasons for this. First, Nelson et al.’s (2011) comprehensive review of antiracist bystander action literature found that there has been diffuse yet insufficient research in the field. Consequently, the frequency, benefits, constraints, and potential of antiracist action remain unclear. It is an empirically neglected and, therefore, under-theorised field (Nelson et al., 2011). Second, bystander action constitutes pro-social behaviour that may provide an effective strategy for combating day-to-day racism. One reason for this is that bystander action functions to challenge explicit and implicit racism in social contexts and therefore may contest the legitimacy of racist social practices (Nelson et al., 2011). Bystander action may help to stop racism, reduce its harmful effects, and strengthen social norms against racism (Nelson et al., 2011). Given that bystander action should be considered an essential component of antiracist social policy (Nelson et al., 2011), developing a more comprehensive conceptual understanding of this phenomena remains a crucial research task.
**Enablers and obstacles to antiracist bystander action**

One component of bystander action research is to examine factors that both enable and provide obstacles to bystander action. The intent to engage in bystander action has been linked to knowledge of what racism is (Aboud & Fenwick, 1999), the awareness of harm inflicted by racism, a sense of personal responsibility to intervene, higher levels of self-efficacy, a desire to educate racist individuals, affective motivations such as anger and empathy, and the influence of antiracist norms (Nelson et al., 2011). Research has also been conducted on bystander action towards refugees in Australia (Stewart, Pedersen & Paradies, 2014). In high-risk scenarios, Stewart et al. found that lower levels of prejudice, risk or fear of reprisal, impression management of interpersonal relationships, and the perception that any intervention would be ineffective predicted the intention to act. In low-risk scenarios, lower levels of prejudice, incidents being perceived as not serious enough and not my role / place were predictors of action. Factors that act as obstacles to bystander action include the influence of exclusive group identity, the fear of violent reprisal (Banyard, 2008), a belief that action would be ineffective (Aboud & Joong, 2008), a lack of knowledge on how to effectively intervene, gender identity related to female stereotypes, preservation of interpersonal relations and impression management, conflict avoidance (Hyers, 2007), affirmation of free speech, and the social norms tolerating racism (Nelson et al., 2011). Moreover, in bystander action research, some individuals remain inhibited when faced with instances of racism despite being non-racist (Nelson et al., 2011). As such, developing a more nuanced understanding of both enabling and inhibitory factors is a vital research task. In particular, as bystander action is a mechanism for combating racism in civil society, further investigation examining the factors that either enable or inhibit bystander action constitutes a platform for
reducing racism and developing pro-social attitudes towards Indigenous Australians.

**Internal and external motivation**

Understanding motivational factors underlying an individual’s racist and pro-social responses are utilised in outgroup research. Internal and external motivational factors are factors underlying racist responses and provide differing accounts as to why an individual may respond without racism (Butz & Plant, 2009; Devine, Plant, Amodio, Harmon-Jones, & Vance, 2002; Plant & Devine, 1998). Individuals who hold egalitarian ideals and values are internally motivated to respond without racism in order to maintain these personally significant standards (Butz & Plant, 2009). In contrast, individuals with an external motivation may respond without racism because they aim to conform to social standards and norms condemning overt racism. That is, individuals may condemn racism to avoid social disapproval for not speaking up (Butz & Plant, 2009). The distinction between internal and external motivations linked to racist free responses has been compared to explicit and implicit processing, social pressure and self-regulation (Butz & Plant, 2009). A consistent finding across these factors is that individuals with higher levels of internal motivation are more likely to respond without racism. Individuals with higher levels of internal motivation respond without racism compared to: individuals with higher levels of external motivation; and, to individuals displaying both higher levels of internal and external motivation.

Studies linking internal and external motivation of bystander action towards racism directed at Indigenous Australians specifically have yet to be undertaken. As noted elsewhere, context matters (Dunn, Forrest, Pe-Pua, Hynes & Maeder-Han, 2009) – one would not expect people to react to perceived outgroups in the same manner in all locations. Some research (Dickter & Newton, 2013) demonstrates that
external social pressures associated with the presence of others is a predictor of bystander action in response to racism. In addition, bystander action is predicted by personal motivations (internal) such as the desire to educate perpetrators to reduce the possibility of repeat behaviour (Dickter & Newton, 2013). Given that internal motivation provides the strongest link to individuals responding without racism, it is also possible that such individuals may be more likely to speak up against racism in social situations. If this were the case, then it would indicate that internal factors such as values, ideals and self-concept, are key factors underlying bystander action.

Moreover, examining internal motivation between low- and high-risk contexts will provide a better understanding of how significant internal motivation is in the context of bystander action. Alternatively, determining the relationship between external motivation and bystander action will also provide useful information regarding the influence of social norms on pro-social behaviour. It is possible that, in certain settings, individuals with higher levels of external motivation may engage in bystander action due to antiracist social norms. In this paper “low risk” and “high risk” refers to perceived risk to personal safety and are differentiated by social context, the explicit nature of the racist remarks, and the level of potential aggression.

**Racism**

Individuals with lower levels of racism are more likely to engage in pro-social behaviour and bystander action (Neto & Pedersen, 2013). Furthermore, the potential for bystander action increases after exposure to antiracist education (Pedersen, Paradies, et al., 2011). Moreover, individuals who have both lower levels of racism and higher levels of optimism (that is, generalised positive outlook), are more likely to engage in bystander action when compared to individuals with lower levels of racism and higher levels of pessimism (Wellman, Czopp, & Geers, 2009). Developing a comprehensive understanding of how lower levels of racism is related to bystander
action, particularly across low-risk and high-risk scenarios, will provide a better understanding of bystander action towards Indigenous Australians especially under different risk scenarios.

**Openness to experience**

Openness to experience is a personality trait derived from the “Big Five Inventory” (John, Naumann, & Soto, 2008; John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991). It refers to an individual’s cognitive flexibility, particularly the capacity and willingness to alter existing attitudes and behaviours after exposure to new events and ideas (Flynn, 2005). Openness to experience is also linked to individuals preferring novelty, intense experience, and variety in their lives. Flynn (2005) found that individuals scoring higher on openness to experience exhibited less racism on self-report assessments measuring explicit antiracist attitudes. Moreover, Sibley and Duckitt (2008) found that low openness to experience was associated with higher levels of prejudice. As openness to experience can moderate stereotyping, it is a factor to consider in conjunction with racism and inter-racial attitudes.

Openness to experience may predict bystander action due an association with lower levels of risk aversion (Flynn, 2005; McCrae, 1987). Bystander action has been characterised as a “troubling social mechanism” that unsettles normalised situations, which have taken for granted racist acts and utterances (Nelson et al., 2011). Individuals engaging in bystander action create inter-personal conflict and relational tension by speaking up against a perpetrator of racism. Individuals with higher openness to experience scores are less risk averse, thereby making it possible that these individuals be more likely to engage in bystander action in both low- and high-risk situations. Bystander action involves confrontation with the active perpetrator of racism, thus individuals engaging in bystander action may do so, in part, because they
tend to engage in novel and intense experiences. Moreover, conflict avoidance has
been shown to inhibit bystander action (Hyers, 2007). Openness to experience could
thereby be a determinant in bystander action as it relates to individuals who prefer
novelty, intense experience, variety and lower conflict avoidance. Finally,
differentiating openness to experience according to low- and high-risk scenarios will
provide the basis for determining whether factors such as low-risk aversion, novelty
and intense experience are significant mediators of bystander action.

**Demographics**

Studies have shown that age may be a factor in whether an individual engages in
bystander action. Studies by Witenberg (2004; 2007) indicate that individuals
between 15-24 years of age are less likely to engage in bystander action due to their
belief in the rights of others to engage in free speech. In Australia, younger
individuals (18-34) were less likely to act when compared with older people (35–45)
(Russell et al., 2013). In addition, studies of bystander action supporting refugees in
Australia found that higher age groups correlated with an increased intent to engage in
bystander action (Stewart et al., 2014). Similarly, studies of bystander action in
relation to Indigenous Australians showed that older individuals are more likely to
engage in bystander action and that this may occur due to increased confidence in
their capacity to effectively intervene (Neto & Pedersen, 2013).

Other studies on bystander action and Indigenous Australians indicate that
older women with left-wing political beliefs are more likely to engage in bystander
action, particularly in low-risk situations (Neto & Pedersen, 2013). More generally,
individuals with stronger left-wing political affiliation and higher age have also been
linked to higher levels of bystander action in high-risk situations (Neto & Pedersen,
2013). Finally, research also indicates that university graduates were more likely to
act compared with non-university graduates (Russell et al., 2013). These findings may simply relate to the well-established link with prejudice and left-wing political leanings and education; furthermore, older people may feel more confident in speaking out.

As shown above, demographic factors have been found to relate to bystander action. Thus including those factors may enhance our understanding of pro-social behaviour in the context of Indigenous Australians.

**Overview of the present study**

Recent literature on bystander action has made some significant inroads into understanding factors contributing to bystander antiracist action. However, a review of the literature reveals the field is under-developed particularly in relation to the influence of 1) openness to experience and 2) internal versus external motivation and 3) in the context of Indigenous Australians specifically. In the present study, we aim to address this gap through investigating the factors underlying the intention to engage in bystander action in support of Indigenous Australians. To do this, individuals were asked to respond to two vignettes featuring examples of racism directed towards Indigenous Australians in the public sphere. The vignettes were judged “low-risk” and “high-risk” due to differences in social context, the explicit nature of the racist remarks, and the level of potential aggression. We hope that examining these social and personality factors may make a contribution in reducing intergroup conflict and promote reconciliation thereby advancing the objectives of peace psychology (Philpot, Balvin, Mellor, & Bretherton, 2013). Our paper is primarily based on social psychological principles; as has been argued elsewhere, oppression involves a number of levels of analysis (Vollhardt & Bilali, 2008) and social psychology has a role to play in addressing some of these levels. As these authors point out, there is a dynamic
and bidirectional relationship between psychological processes and social structures. All levels need to be addressed.

Aims and prediction

Our general aim was to determine the relative strength of any relationships between bystander action and the independent variables described previously by way of regression analysis. Further, we were interested in whether there would be any differences in potential action in a high risk and low risk scenario. More specifically, we predicted the following. First, that participants high in internal motivation would be more likely to take bystander action (Prediction 1). We made no prediction with regard to external motivation. Second, that reported racism towards Indigenous Australians relate to lower levels of bystander action (Prediction 2). Third, participants high in openness to experience would be more likely to engage in bystander action (Prediction 3). Finally, participants experiencing the low-risk scenario with racist comments from a colleague would be more likely to exhibit the intent for bystander action than participants subject to the high-risk situation with strangers on the train (Prediction 4).

Method

Participants/Procedure

Participants received an invitation letter detailing the study, ethics clearance, and the accompanying questionnaire. The cover letter introduced the study and explained that participation was completely voluntary and anonymous. Embedded consent was obtained by the voluntary completion of the study. Participants were Australian citizens aged 18 years and over. They were recruited from two sources: Murdoch University’s Social and Community On-line Research Database (SCORED) and via the internet through the first researcher's email and Facebook page. SCORED provided an opportunity for community involvement in research via the Internet. The
internet sample utilised a convenience / snowball method to distribute the surveys; respondents were also encouraged to forward the invitation letter to their family, friends and acquaintances via email and Facebook. The questionnaire was completed and submitted online using SCORED.

**Measures**

The survey contained a cover letter and sections on demographics, personality, racism towards Indigenous Australians, motivation, and bystander action intention. All respondents completed the survey in the following order: cover letter / consent, demographics, openness to experience, racism towards Indigenous Australians, internal / external motivation, and anti-racist bystander action (low risk was followed by high risk).

**Openness to experience.** Participant’s level of openness to experience was measured using 10 questions with a 1-7 Likert rating scale indicating levels of agreement (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). These questions were adapted from the Big Five Inventory (John et al., 2008). The scale’s reliability for the longer version has been measured at $\alpha = .85$, and $\alpha = .75$ in the shorter version of the measure (Rammstedt & John, 2007). Examples of items include: “I am someone who is original, comes up with new ideas” and “I am someone who is inventive”. Individuals with higher scores indicate higher levels of openness.

**Racism towards Indigenous Australians.** The Attitudes Towards Indigenous Australians scale (the “ATIA scale”) measured non-Indigenous Australians’ levels of racism towards Indigenous Australians. The scale was adapted from Pedersen, Beven, Walker, & Griffiths (2004) and has been shown to have high reliability in that study ($\alpha = .93$). The scale consisted of 18 items measured using a 1-7 rating scale and participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement or
disagreement with each statement. Examples of items include: “Indigenous Australians would be lost without white Australians in today’s society” and “Urban Aborigines tend to be pretty hostile”. Higher scores indicate higher levels of racism.

**Internal and external motivation.** Participants were asked 10 questions regarding how they interact with Indigenous Australians and were provided with a 1-7 rating scale indicating levels of agreement or disagreement with each item. The survey questions measuring internal and external motivation were amended from Plant and Devine (1998) with a reliability ranging from $\alpha = .76$ to .85. Examples of items include: “Because of today's PC (politically correct) standards I try to appear non-prejudiced towards Indigenous people” and “I attempt to act in non-prejudiced ways towards Indigenous people because it is personally important to me”. Higher scores indicate higher levels of motivation on both scales.

**Antiracist bystander action.** To measure the intent to engage in bystander antiracism, participants were asked whether they would speak up in support of Indigenous Australians if they were to witness racial discrimination. Two bystander scenarios, differentiated by low- and high-risk to personal safety, were adapted from Pedersen et al. (2011). The low-risk scenario asked whether participants would intervene if work colleagues were making racist comments about Indigenous people as a group. Participants were asked whether they would agree with the work colleague’s view or with an alternative view. The high-risk scenario asked whether participants would intervene in a public setting where a stranger was racially abusing an Indigenous person. Participants were asked whether they would agree with the perpetrator’s view or an alternative view. In both instances, they were then asked how likely they were to intervene using a 7-point rating scale (1 extremely unlikely - 7 extremely likely). Only participants who saw the incidents as problematic were
included in the sample (LR = 82% and HR = 92%). The low- and high-risk scenarios were analysed separately.

**Demographics.** Participants were asked to report their age, sex, political preference, education level, and their ethnic and cultural background. The study comprised of 168 participants who were asked to indicate their age (in years), gender (1 = male, 2 = female), political preference (5 = far right, 1 = far left and 5 = don’t care), ethnic and cultural background (Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, African, Asian, Caucasian/European, Indian, Middle Eastern, Pacific Islander or “other”), educational attainment (1 = none through to 6 = higher degree), and religious affiliation. These questions were adapted from Stewart et al. (2014). In the data analysis, respondents who answered, “don’t care” with respect to politics were omitted from demographics to establish a clearer distribution between left, centre, and right political views. The mean age of the participants was 44 years (SD = 15, range = 18 – 86 years) and two thirds of the participants were female (67.7%) compared to male (32.3%). Of the participants who responded, most identified as being Caucasian / European (88.3%) and the remainder of the participants was Asian (6.2%), Indian (3.1%), Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (1.9%) (the Indigenous participants were deleted from the sample) and of Middle Eastern (0.6%) descent. Political preference was dispersed between the left, centre, and right. Respondents indicated being somewhat left (34.9%), centre (27.4%), somewhat right (22.6%), strongly left (12.3%) and strongly right (2.7%). Education levels were relatively high and varied from bachelor degree (part or completed) (37.8%), higher degree (Masters or PhD) (22.0%), completed secondary school (14.6%), undergraduate diploma (part or completed) (11.0%), vocational training (part or completed) (10.4%), and did not complete secondary school (4.3%). Finally, with regard to religion, most participants
had no religion (60.0%) with the remainder being Christian (33.1%), Buddhist (3.1%), Hindu (1.8%), Muslim (1.2%), and Jewish (0.6%).

The 2012 Australian Bureau of Statistics census data in Western Australia showed 50.3% male and 49.7% female, with 22.7% having completed post secondary qualifications (ABS, 2012). In contrast, participants in this study were mostly female and had higher levels of post-secondary education. In summary, the sample was mostly female and mostly Caucasian / European. There was a predominance of “no religion” although Christianity was also evident for a significant minority of the sample. Levels of post secondary education were higher than the general population and the sample was more politically left-leaning than right-leaning or centre.

Results

Descriptives

The mean score for each rating scale was calculated from the raw scores derived from the 1-7 scoring system. For each scale, higher numbers indicated higher scores on the specific construct. Descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1. The mean, standard deviation, reliability coefficients, items per scale, and the number of respondents answering each scale are shown. The Alpha coefficients (Cronbach’s alpha) for each scale had a high reliability ranging from .80 to .94 (Table 1). Two questions were excluded to improve the reliability of the openness to experience scale. They were: “I am someone who prefers work that is routine” and “I am someone who has few artistic experiences”). In this study, the low- and high-risk scenarios measuring the intent to engage in bystander action in support of Indigenous Australians were separated. The mean scores for openness, internal motivation, and low- and high-risk action intention fell above the midpoint (four) while racism and external motivation fell below the midpoint.
Correlations

For these analyses, all participants who supported the victim were used. Correlations between the intent to engage in bystander action supporting Indigenous Australians and predictor variables are shown in Table 2. The three key predictor variables used to examine the study’s aims were internal motivation (Prediction 1), racism towards Indigenous Australians (Prediction 2), and openness to experience (Prediction 3). The correlates to low-risk action are shown on the left diagonal, while correlations to high-risk action are on the right diagonal.

As shown in Table 2, participants were significantly more likely to take action in the low-risk scenario if they scored high on internal motivation and openness and scored low on racism and external motivation. Participants were significantly more likely to take action in the high-risk scenario if they scored high on internal motivation and openness, they reported left-leaning politics and being female, as well as lower levels of racism and external motivation.

Predictors of bystander action in low- and high-risk scenarios

To examine which independent variables were the strongest predictors of bystander action, we conducted two standard multiple regression analyses in the low- and high-risk scenarios (Table 3) using the statistically significant correlations from Table 2. This allowed for an investigation of predictor variables (openness to experience and internal / external motivation) not previously examined in bystander antiracism research. Step one encompassed demographic variables together with racism (this has already been found to be a significant predictor of action (Yeto & Pedersen, 2013) while step two incorporated the previously untested social-psychological variables.
In the low-risk scenario, the intention to speak out was separated into two steps. The first step contained one variable: racism. Step 2 contained internal motivation, external motivation, and openness. Thus, step 1 containing racism ($\beta = -0.34, p < .001$) accounted for a significant 11% ($R^2$ change = .114, $p < .001$) of the variance in action intentions (Table 3). Step 2, internal motivation ($\beta = .20, p = .02$) and openness ($\beta = .21, p = .01$) accounted for a significant proportion of the variance ($R^2$ change = .10, $p < .001$) totaling 10% of the variance in action intentions in support of Indigenous Australians. The total shared variance of step 1 and step 2 was a significant 22% (total $R^2 = .215, p < .001$) of the variance in action intentions in support of Indigenous Australians for the low-risk scenario.

The high-risk scenario was also analysed using a two-step process. Step 1 included politics, sex and racism. Step 2 contained internal motivation, external motivation and openness. In step 1 of the high-risk group, politics was not significant ($\beta = .043, p = .65$), while sex ($\beta = .206, p = .02$), and racism ($\beta = -.341, p = .001$) accounted for 15% ($R^2$ change = .151, $p < .001$) of the variance in the intention to engage in bystander action in support of Indigenous Australians (Table 3). Individual items in step 2 of the high-risk group was not statistically significant and only accounted for 3% ($R^2$ change = .027, $p < .001$) of the variance linked to bystander action in support of Indigenous Australians (Table 3). The total shared variance of step 1 and step 2 was a significant 18% (total $R^2 = .178, p < .001$) in the high-risk scenario (Table 3).

Overall, including both Step 1 and Step 2 variables, the analysis in the low-risk scenario shows that lower racism, higher internal motivation, and openness were the strongest predictors of the intention to engage in bystander action in support of Indigenous Australians. In the high-risk scenario, again including both Step 1 and
Step 2 variables, lower racism and being female were predictors of the intent to engage in bystander action in support of Indigenous Australians.

**Comparison between low- and high-risk scenarios**

A paired samples t-test was used to test Prediction 4 that participants experiencing the low-risk scenario with racist comments from a colleague would be more likely to exhibit the intent for bystander action than participants subject to the high-risk situation with strangers on the train. The results of the t-test indicated that, although the intention to engage in bystander action was significantly correlated between the low-risk and high-risk groups, participants were more likely to act in the low-risk scenario \((M = 5.65)\) compared with the high-risk scenario \((M = 5.28)\) \((t (121) = 2.77, p = .007)\). Thus, Prediction 4 is supported.

**Discussion**

Australia’s long history of oppression and discrimination against Indigenous Australians has led to a disadvantaged outgroup experiencing negative biopsychosocial outcomes (Paradies et al., 2008). In our study, we examined psychosocial factors linked to bystander action in support of Indigenous Australians. This is important, as antiracist bystander action remains largely under-theorised (Nelson et al., 2011) and is also an untapped form of antiracist social intervention (Russell et al., 2013) and thus is very relevant to the goals of peace psychology; in particular, the role of “peacemaking” (Christie, 2006). The current investigation is also of theoretical and social importance in contemporary dialogues on Indigenous reconciliation (Mellor, Bretherton & Firth, 2007; Philpot, Balvin, Mellor & Bretherton, 2013) and more generally, the affirmation of cultural diversity in Australian society.
Bystander action and internal motivation (Prediction 1)

We first examined whether internal and external motivation was linked to bystander action in support of Indigenous Australians. Using correlational analysis, we found that both variables were linked with both scenarios. We were, however, more interested in the unique variance explained in the regressions and it is to this we now turn.

In the low-risk scenario, higher internal motivation significantly predicted the intention to engage in bystander action (Table 3). Subjects with greater internal motivation were significantly more likely to intervene in a racist situation than participants with less internal motivation. The internal motivation scale used in this study is derived from Plant and Devine (1998). They saw internal motivation as being an intention to respond without prejudice due to personally important internal standards. Their research on internal motivation found that greater goal and value internalisation is highly predictive of an individual acting consistently with these goals and values. Internal motivation is connected with an individual’s personal values (i.e. egalitarian ideals; internalised non-prejudiced beliefs) that are personally important and maintain a sense of self-concept (Butz & Plant, 2009; Plant & Devine, 1998). However, these studies examined responses without prejudice, focusing instead on cognitive constructs like the self-regulation of implicit and explicit mental processes. Hence to act without prejudice is different than to act in support of an individual being subjected to racial vilification. The results of our study link values with the intent to act as opposed to the suppression or absence of racism.

The finding that higher internal motivation predicted the intent to engage in bystander action in the low-risk scenario is a notable study outcome. Previous research indicates that individuals engage in bystander action due to personal values
and a desire to educate the perpetrator on the harmful effects of racism (Hyers, 2007; Russell et al., 2013). This present research indirectly supports Griffiths and Pedersen (2009) who found that personal values connected to an individual’s moral compass provide a point of orientation for engaging in bystander action. Moreover, Butz and Plant (1998) showed that internal motivation was the strongest predictor for individuals to respond without prejudice and that this corresponds with an internalisation of goals and values. Hence, the more strongly the situation resonates with an individual’s core values, the greater the likelihood of a response. Of course, the question of what the individual identifies is an unanswered question. In the present study, internal motivations were linked to personal values against being racist, and this link between the two variables predicted bystander action in support of Indigenous Australians. In summary, the results of this present study demonstrate the importance of personal values in creating the basis for individuals to act against prejudice. Because high internal motivation predicted bystander action, then the focal point of values-based antiracist social education and ethical decision making models should be emphasised. These issues concerning the practical benefits of the study are discussed later.

Conversely, the present study found that external motivation was significantly *negatively correlated* with bystander action in the low- and high-risk scenarios. The regression analysis showed no association between external motivation and anti-racist bystander action in both low and high-risk scenarios. This means that individuals reporting that they were highly motivated by external factors to appear non-prejudiced were *less* likely to engage in bystander action in support of Indigenous Australians. In other words, individuals were not motivated to act because “others” thought they should do so. In our study, external motivation was defined as a social pressure to
comply without racism due to the influence of social norms (Plant & Devine, 1998). Plant and Devine (1998) have similarly shown that higher levels of external motivation are not reliable predictors of non-prejudiced behaviour. In fact, their research shows that higher levels of internal motivation coupled with higher levels of external motivations have less predictive capacity to respond without prejudice than individuals with higher levels of internal motivation and lower levels of external motivation (Devine et al., 2002). Their explanation of this difference is that external motivation to respond without prejudice reflects social conformism rather than behaviour driven by personally important values. As such, external motivation to respond without prejudice functions to some extent, but may break down at the level of implicit cognitive processes (Devine et al., 2002).

Prescriptive social norms that explicitly regulate social behaviour are undoubtedly important in civil society and to some extent would inhibit everyday racism. Pro-social bystander action was not predicted by external motivation. Individuals were not motivated to act because “others” think they should do so. In fact, research shows that anti-prejudice education based on external motivations to conform to social prescriptions may have unintended and unhelpful consequence. Legault, Gutsell and Inzlicht (2011) found that pressuring individuals to act in non-prejudiced ways can actually increase levels of prejudice. They conjecture that an increase in prejudiced responses subsequent to being urged to respond without prejudice is primarily a defiant response prompted by a perceived threat to personal autonomy. Moreover, they found that non-prejudiced responses increase when individuals have greater autonomy and are able to discern for themselves the value of being non-prejudiced (Legault et al., 2011). Thus, this present research supports the contention that antiracist education based on external motivation should not be
prescriptive and that the antiracist social education should be value-based.

**Bystander action and racism towards Indigenous Australians (Prediction 2)**

The second aim of the study was to determine whether lower levels of racism towards Indigenous Australians is linked to bystander action. Lower levels of racism towards Indigenous Australians were significant correlates of bystander action in both the low- and high-risk scenarios. However, this significance was only evident in step 1 of the regression in both groups (Table 3). The present research showed that individuals with low racism scores were significantly more likely to engage in bystander action in support of Indigenous Australians in both the low- and high-risk scenarios.

**Bystander action and gender**

Another variable which was found to be relevant to bystander action was that of gender. In the high-risk scenario, participants who were female also were more likely to engage in bystander action in support of Indigenous Australians. These results are supported by recent bystander research which also found that low levels of racism and being female (Russell et al., 2013) predicted bystander action (Neto & Pedersen, 2013).

**Bystander action and openness to experience (Prediction 3)**

It was predicted that higher scores on openness to experience scales would be linked to bystander action in support of Indigenous Australians in both low- and high-risk scenarios. Participants with higher scores on openness to experience scales are characterised as generally being more novelty seeking, open minded, creative, and also demonstrating lower levels of conflict avoidance behavior, and lower scores on self-report racism measures (Flynn, 2005). As such, it seemed probable that participants with higher scores for openness to experience would also be more likely
to engage in bystander action in support of Indigenous Australians. This was found to be the case with respect to the correlational data.

With respect to the regression, we found that openness significantly predicted bystander action but only in the low-risk scenario. Openness to experience has been linked with political action in other countries. For example, research shows that openness correlates with political participation and rally attendance in South Korea (Ha, Kim, & Jo, 2013). Thus, if bystander action is viewed as a political act, then the correlation between openness and lower prejudice situates bystander action firmly in the progressivist discourse in Australian socio-politics. However, as theorists note, individuals with higher levels of openness do not necessarily hold liberal (progressivist) political views; rather, individuals with higher openness may subsequently develop a socially progressive politics (McCrae, 1987).

**Bystander action and risk level (Prediction 4)**

This prediction tested whether participants would be less likely to engage in bystander action in support of Indigenous Australians as the level of risk increased from a low-risk situation with a colleague to a high-risk situation with a racist comment from a stranger on a train. The results indicated that the intention to engage in bystander action was significantly correlated between the low-risk and high-risk groups. However, those participants subject to the low-risk scenario with a colleague were significantly more likely to exhibit the intention to engage in bystander action than participants subjected to the high-risk scenario with a stranger. This tells us that “context matters” which has also been found in other bystander research. For example, Stewart et al. (2014) found that feelings of personal safety affected whether participants would intervene when witnessing a racist incident.
Theoretical and practical applications

Bystander action remains a largely untapped resource for mitigating racism and for developing strong antiracist social norms (Russell et al., 2013). People who “…confront the victims of violence have a special obligation to name that social structure, understand it, and change it (Pilisuk, 1998, p. 214). As argued elsewhere, however, the precise action taken will depend on the safety of the immediate situation (Stewart et al., 2014). Our research adds to our understanding of bystander antiracism in several ways. Firstly, bystander action is predicted by higher internal motivation, which is linked to personal values. As such, antiracist discourse should emphasize personal values in the context of pro-social education, as this may provide an effective form of combating everyday racism (Griffiths & Pedersen, 2009). Second, the results build on other recent contributions to bystander antiracist action research (Kravitz & Platania, 1993; Neto & Pedersen, 2013; Russell et al., 2013). Specifically, it reinforces the important role that women have in speaking out against racism. Further research examining the factors underlying bystander action in women and men, particularly in high-risk scenarios, would be useful to obtain a clearer picture of more specific factors linked to gender. In addition, as higher levels of openness to experience predict bystander action, then antiracist education programs might also be informed by progressivist ideals such as equality and the affirmation of cultural diversity. Finally, we note that the significant correlations between variables are still relevant for both scenarios even if their unique contribution to the regression analysis was diminished. For example, racism was a significant correlate for both scenarios. We argue that when conducting antiracism interventions, it is necessary to deal with racism with respect to both sorts of scenarios – racism underpins antiracism action.
Limitations and future research.

The demographics represented in the sample contained several biases; in particular with respect to gender, ethnicity and education levels (we had more women, more Caucasians and highly educated participants) which limits the generalisability of the findings. As the intent to engage in bystander action is correlated with higher levels of education and being female (Russell et al., 2013), this present sample contains possible bias. However, previous research has shown that university graduates are more likely to engage in bystander action compared with non-university graduates (Russell et al., 2013). Furthermore, other research has shown that in low-risk situations, women are more likely to engage in bystander action in support of Indigenous Australians (Neto & Pedersen, 2013). Therefore, the present study may contain possible bias; yet, it is in line with bias present in other similar studies. Future studies could attempt to address this bias which appears in much of the social-psychological research.

While openness to experience was a predictor of the intent to engage in bystander action in the low-risk group, more research needs to be undertaken to determine the specific constructs underlying openness that are most predictive of bystander action. Openness to experience is associated with a wide array of dissimilar constructs (McCrae, 1987). For example, it is associated with having an active imagination, sensitivity to aesthetics, a preference for variety, intellectual curiosity, low conflict avoidance, a receptivity to feelings, and higher creativity (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Narrowing down the specific constructs in openness to experience predictive of bystander action would provide greater insight into the mechanisms responsible for the positive relationship between higher openness and bystander
action. This should be a key topic of future research as it may provide some important insights into avenues in which to reduce racism.

The finding that internal motivation predicts the intent to engage in bystander action in support of Indigenous Australians highlights the importance of personal values in bystander action. Despite this, a limitation to this finding concerns determining what specific values are at stake with respect to bystander antiracism. Further exploration of the value construct in the internal motivation measure (Butz & Plant, 2009; Devine et al., 2002; Plant & Devine, 1998) would be useful in developing a greater awareness of what specific, personally important, values might motivate an individual to act. For example, research shows that the desire to educate is one motivation underlying the intent to engage in bystander antiracism (Russell et al., 2013). Thus, for some individuals, the desire to educate can be regarded as an internal motivation that acts as a value of personal importance. Further research on internal motivation, values, and bystander action is required to determine specific values (i.e. egalitarianism, duty) motivating bystander action. Further research examining internal motivation and values has the practical benefit of developing a more nuanced discourse of reconciliation and greater focus in developing antiracist strategies.

Finally, there are also other unmeasured variables which are relevant (e.g., many of those outlined in Nelson et al., 2011). As noted, the field of bystander antiracism is generally a young field but once more research is forthcoming, it would be interesting, using a representative study, to examine all the relevant variables to see which are most useful in predicting bystander action.

**Concluding remarks**

In the present study, we examined the intent to engage in bystander antiracism on behalf of Indigenous Australians. We found significant differences between the
intent to engage in bystander action in low- and high-risk scenarios and different predictors which indicates the power of the situation. We note that although our paper has concentrated on “negative peace” (that is, eliminating violence through bystander antiracism) we also need to aim for positive peace (that is, a fairer social system that gives equity to Indigenous people (see Christie et al., 2006).

We argue, as has been argued elsewhere (e.g., Pedersen & Thomas, 2013), that the issue of attitudinal violence needs addressing. However, as touched on above, the situation with respect to Indigenous Australians needs to go beyond individual psychology and inter-personal interventions (see Pilisuk, 1998, for example, on the power of structural forms of oppression). Furthermore, as outlined by Bretherton and Mellor (2006), structural violence against Indigenous Australians is very much part of Australian society and has deep historical roots. Structural violence is more difficult to address because of its apparent normalcy (Pilisuk, 1998). Yet as Bretherton and Mellor (2006) put it, “reconciliation is a process rather than a state and so links to a concept of peace that is dynamic and positive” (p. 95). Thus, for Australia to grow into a just and fair society, all aspects of violence towards Indigenous Australians need addressing: including the inter-personal issues outlined in this paper. This is the case because, for no other reason, active peace-loving individuals can become a critical mass and change other forms of structural violence. This can only be a good thing.
References


Table 1.

Descriptives For All Scales

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<th>Scale</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Total N</th>
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<td>.80</td>
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<td>158</td>
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Scales range from 1-7; Support of low- and high-risk view = 1 or 2
Table 2

*Inter-Correlation Among Variables*

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<th>3.</th>
<th>4.</th>
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<th>6.</th>
<th>7.</th>
<th>8.</th>
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<td>-262**</td>
<td>.164*</td>
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<td>-166*</td>
<td>-205*</td>
<td>.078</td>
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<td>-215**</td>
<td>.190*</td>
<td>-.513**</td>
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<td>.136</td>
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<td>-.205*</td>
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<td>-.101</td>
<td>-.114</td>
<td>-250**</td>
<td>.164*</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>.133</td>
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<td>-.289**</td>
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<td>-.215*</td>
<td>-.227**</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.366**</td>
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</table>

Note: Left diagonal = Low-risk; Right diagonal = High-risk; * = p < .05; ** = p < .01; *** = p < .001 (all two-tailed)
### Table 3

Hierarchical Regression for Low- and High-risk Action Intentions

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<thead>
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<th>Variables entered</th>
<th>r</th>
<th>$\beta^a$</th>
<th>$\beta^b$</th>
<th>$R^2$ change</th>
<th>Total $R^2$</th>
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</thead>
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<td>-.337***</td>
<td>-.156</td>
<td>.114***</td>
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<td>.101***</td>
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<td>-.205</td>
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<td>.027***</td>
<td>.178***</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$; *** = $p < .001$ (all two-tailed)

Note. After missing data were taken into account, 128 participants were included for both analyses.
Appendix: Low and high risk scenarios

Low risk scenario

You are having lunch with several non-Indigenous colleagues. At one point, the conversation turns to issues regarding Indigenous Australians. One of your colleagues says: “They mostly are a bunch of lazy bastards”. The conversation continues along these lines, and your colleagues are quite incensed displaying a very negative view of Indigenous people in general.

High risk scenario

You are on a train and find yourself sitting opposite an Indigenous woman. A non-Indigenous man gets on the train and sits next to you. He looks at the Indigenous woman and immediately says to you in a loud voice: “I can’t believe they wanted an apology from us! Abo’s need to get over it and stop asking for handouts! All they want is for everyone else to pay their way. Why don’t they get a job instead of wasting taxpayer’s hard earned money on booze! They need to learn how to live like the rest of us!”