

# Editorial: Challenging injustice: Understanding upstanding, civic action, and bystander intervention to promote justice

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## Abstract

Throughout history, individuals and communities have come together to challenge injustice in the local community and across the globe. In recent years, we have seen communities rally together to advocate for changes in policy and practice to address injustices faced by marginalized and disenfranchised groups of people. For instance, communities have taken action through the Movement for Black Lives in the United States, the women's uprising in Iran following the death of Mahsa Amini, and the pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong. These challenges to social injustices are not only led by adults. Rather, youth engage in civic action to amplify the voices of those who are marginalized, isolated, or victimized and frequently organize to protest injustice and foster collective action through social media or other technology. These challenges to injustice often arise from community-led efforts, rooted in the unique contexts and histories of the local community. This special issue considers challenging injustice broadly to include bystander intervention in instances of bullying, harassment, or aggression, political and civic engagement, anti-racist or anti-oppression activism, and resistance to injustice in institutions and communities. Three overarching themes are featured in this special issue: (1) work examining bullying experiences and factors that motivate bystander intervention in response to bullying; (2) scholarship exploring

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identity, socialization, and critical action and (3) research focused on collective action and challenging inequalities.

#### KEYWORDS

bullying, bystanders, challenging injustice, civic action

## 1 | BULLYING AND BYSTANDER INTERVENTION

In terms of research on bullying and bystander intervention, Cocco et al. (2023) report outcomes of a vicarious contact intervention with Italian first to third-grade children using fairy tales about stigma-based bullying of foreigners. Compared to the control condition, children in the intervention condition reported greater intergroup empathy and anti-bullying norms. Further, mediation analyses revealed that the intervention improved helping and intergroup contact intentions through an increase in intergroup empathy.

Ejigu and Teketel (2023) report findings from a survey on personal and situational factors associated with bystander behaviour in response to bullying. They surveyed over 600 adolescents (12–16 years of age) in North Western Ethiopia and documented that different factors predicted defending behaviours compared to passive bystanding. Specifically, defending was associated with self-efficacy for intervention, affective empathy, prior victimization experiences, sense of power and, interestingly, moral disengagement. Additionally, with age, students were less likely to report defending behaviours. Passive behaviours were also associated with moral disengagement, with perceptions of costs/benefits associated with defending, self-efficacy, and prior experiences of victimization. Further, boys were more likely to engage in passive bystanding than girls. Results are discussed considering the particular cultural context of Ethiopia.

Gönültaş et al. (2023) examined Turkish adolescents' responses following intragroup (targeting a Turkish peer) and intergroup (targeting a Syrian refugee) bullying. Specifically, results examined the likelihood of including victims and bullies in social situations following the bullying. Intergroup contact emerged as an important predictor of inclusivity, with participants in schools with more Syrian peers more likely to indicate that they would include Syrian victims than would participants in schools with lower numbers of Syrian peers, who were more likely to include the Turkish victims and bullies who targeted the Syrian peer. Additionally, adolescents who reported high prejudice and desire for social distance were less likely to include the Syrian victim, while those with higher empathy were more likely to include the Syrian victim. Findings also demonstrated that participants' prior experience with bullying and their moral judgements around bullying were also significant predictors of inclusion.

Hitti and Killen (2023) report the results of three studies with adolescents focused on challenging inclusive and exclusive peer norms. Study 1 focused on non-Arab American adolescents assessing Arab American/non-Arab American inclusion scenarios. Study 2 centred on non-Asian and Asian American adolescents responding to Asian/non-Asian American inclusion scenarios, and Study 3 focused on Lebanese adolescents assessing Lebanese and American inclusion scenarios. Findings across the studies documented that the adolescents supported the inclusion of ethnic/cultural outgroup members. Participants approved of peers who challenged exclusive group norms and disapproved of those who challenged inclusive group norms. Findings also revealed some differences across contexts.

Palmer et al. (2023) explored children's and adolescents' bystander responses to intergroup name-calling in contexts with victims from a stigmatized (ethnicity) or non-stigmatized (school) outgroup. Participants evaluated proactive bystanders more positively than passive bystanders. Further, adolescents (compared to children) were more likely to think that their peers would be more positive towards proactive bystanders than passive bystanders when the target was a stigmatized outgroup member.

## 2 | IDENTITY, SOCIALIZATION, AND CRITICAL ACTION

Anyiwo et al. (2023) examined pathways between parental racial socialization and socio-political development for 500 Black American adolescents, finding that parent racial socialization was positively associated with awareness of racial inequality and agency in addressing racism. Socialization messages that acknowledged racial barriers were associated with political and communal racial justice actions. Socialization messages emphasizing cultural pride were associated with political and communal racial justice and interpersonal and online actions.

Banks et al. (2023) report outcomes of a community intervention focused on building knowledge and competence about race and racism with over 500 White individuals in the United States. Following 10 sessions (40 h), participants reported increased racial capacity around understanding race and racism and greater confidence in participating in intergroup racial discussions.

Pender et al. (2023) analysed qualitative interviews and poetry from 12 emerging adults who facilitated a critical literacy program for youth centred on counterstorytelling to challenge injustice and facilitate identity development. The themes that the emerging adults described were using counterstorytelling to take ownership of one's identity and community building through counterstorytelling as a place of resistance against racism and other structural oppression.

Briggs et al. (2023) used latent profile analysis to examine associations between critical consciousness and socio-cultural factors, such as racial socialization, for Black adolescents in the United States. Four profiles of adolescent critical consciousness emerged: precritical bystander, liberated actor, precritical actor, and acritical bystander. Profile membership was associated with racial identity, racial socialization, and experiences of racial stress.

Compare and Albanesi (2023) present a systematic review of service-learning in higher education settings as a way to foster social justice outcomes. They reviewed 47 papers documenting that service-learning experiences promoted social justice beliefs, fostered the development of altruistic behaviours and commitment to social justice, and shaped participants' critical understanding of processes such as injustices.

Gee and Johnson (2023) examine White cisgender heterosexual young adults from the United States to explore what drives civic action. Specifically, they focus on individual and collective civic efficacy and a range of different civic actions, such as voting, protesting, and volunteering. Findings revealed that individual civic efficacy predicted all types of civic actions. However, boycotting and supporting political candidates was more complex, with both individual and collective civic efficacy demonstrating curvilinear relations with these types of civic action. Specifically, boycotting and supporting a political candidate was more likely at the highest and lowest levels of collective efficacy, and supporting a political candidate was less likely at the highest and lowest levels of individual efficacy.

Këllezi et al. (2023) interviewed survivors of dictatorial crimes from Albania, guided by a social identity approach. They document ways in which communities can cause harm and become "Social Curses" for instance, by perpetrating fear and exerting control during the dictatorship and refusing to accept responsibility for the crimes that occurred. Communities also undermine work to address injustices through collective action, which can impact survivors by fostering feelings of exclusion and reducing their hope for change.

Le et al. (2023) explore the relationship between social responsibility, critical reflection, self-regulation, and civic action with a sample of adolescents from the United States. Specifically, they focus on political activities, social activism, and community service as types of civic action. They find that social responsibility was related to each type of civic action. They also find that critical reflection about inequality moderated the relationship between social responsibility and political activities, with the relationship between social responsibility and political activities stronger for those with high levels of critical reflection. Self-regulation was not a significant moderator for any type of civic action.

Suzuki et al. (2023) test a multidimensional measure of critical action (service, community change, expression, and care) with a sample of Asian and Hispanic/Latinx youth in the United States. Findings suggested differences by racial-ethnic group, gender, and birthplace (in the U.S. versus outside of the U.S.). The authors recommend careful attention to within and between group differences when measuring and studying critical action.

### 3 | COLLECTIVE ACTION AND CHALLENGING INEQUALITY

Bobo and Akhurst (2023) provide a case study examining the Siyakhana@Makana program at Rhodes University, a 19-week-long volunteer program centred on bringing together community members and student volunteers around community engagement activities. Interviews, focus groups, and observations with four community partners document positive outcomes for the community partners, revealing that the community engagement activities were empowering and helped mobilize to address local problems collaboratively.

del Fresno-Díaz et al. (2023) examine mechanisms that drive collective action around economic threats during the COVID-19 pandemic, when encouraged social isolation may have impeded such action. With samples of Spanish adults, they document that shared identity (working-class and 99% identity), and interdependent self-construal served as mediators between collective economic threat and intolerance to such threats and desires to engage in collective action to address economic threats.

Duque et al. (2023) explore Latin American migrants in the domestic work sector in Spain, using qualitative interviews to understand socio-political development and experiences of injustice. Analyses found that migrant domestic workers move from an acritical stage through pre-critical, critical, and liberation stages, following the Sociopolitical Development framework. The migrant domestic workers draw on their experiences with exploitation, learn about their rights (pre-critical stage), receive training around their rights, and engage in socio-political activities (critical and liberation stages).

Iqbal (2023) presents analyses examining gender-based street harassment of women in Bangladesh, focusing on a grassroots women's empowerment group. Although network centrality was not associated with challenging stress harassment in line with the group's norms, exploratory analyses provided insight into other ways involvement with an empowerment group may help. Specifically, network centrality predicted the likelihood of removing oneself from situations when harassed and self-efficacy for intervening to challenge street harassment.

Putra and Shadiqi (2023) aimed to understand support for the civil disobedience movement in Myanmar amongst Muslim and non-Muslim individuals from Indonesia. Predictors of support for the civil disobedience movement were perceptions of internal problems in Indonesia and support for human rights. Lack of empathy and perceptions of victimized groups also predicted solidarity with the movement. The findings also document differences in predictors for the Muslim and non-Muslim samples.

Uluğ et al. (2023) report outcomes of research on gender discrimination and collective action with women in the United States, Ukraine, and Turkey. Findings suggest witnessing gender discrimination was associated with a greater desire to engage in collective action for gender justice. Moreover, this relationship was stronger for participants who perceived lower female support.

In summary, this special issue presents research from across the globe examining ways in which individuals and communities address or challenge injustices and the processes that motivate and support challenging of injustices. We hope that this special issue provides insight, support and new directions both for community-based actions to resist injustice as well as for research documenting barriers and facilitators to community efforts to ensure social justice.

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