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Abstract

Bias-based bullying is a significant problem in the United States, including aggression targeting college students with minoritized social identities. Bystander responsiveness can help to buffer the effects, but social identity factors may influence how students respond to bias-based aggression among peers. We conducted a cross-sectional analysis of a subsample ($N=7,291$) of the 2018-2019 Healthy Minds Study to test correlations between racial, sexual, and gender identities and self-reported and hypothetical peer interventions. Students who identify with minoritized sexual and gender identities, across racial identities, are most likely to report past or intended interventions while students who identify as straight, cisgender, male, and White are least likely. Specifically, students with minoritized sexual and gender identities are 32 percent more likely than straight and cisgender peers to report that they had intervened in the past year and 36 percent more likely to indicate that they intend to intervene in the future. Experiences of discrimination and belonging are significant but separate covariates. Interventions to support peer responsiveness must attend to dynamics of power, oppression, and social identity to reach more students.

Keywords: Verbal aggression, Bias-based bullying, Bystanders, Social identity, Prosocial behavior

Social Identity as a Factor in Bystander Responses
to Bias-Based Verbal Aggression Among College Students

With recent increases in racial animus and reports of hate crimes in the United States, college students with minoritized social identities are particularly vulnerable to bias-based aggression on campus (Baker & Britton, 2021; Pew Research Center, 2019). Students with minoritized racial, sexual, and gender identities may be especially impacted when they witness bias-based bullying such as verbal aggression (Grinshteyn et al., 2021). We wondered whether college students with minoritized social identities may be more likely to attempt to support peers facing racist, homophobic, and transphobic aggression. The “linked fate” hypothesis suggests that individuals feel an overriding sense of connection and belonging with others in a group when they believe that their own interests are inextricably tied to that group (Gay & Tate, 1998; Simien, 2005). Minoritized college students who witness bias-based aggression toward others with shared structural vulnerabilities, or who have been similarly targeted, may feel more responsible for intervening; they may also be in a better position to offer support that feels credible to students directly targeted (Byers & Cerulli, 2021; Byers, 2016).

In the current study, we sought to understand the role of racial, sexual, and gender identities in college students’ efforts to support each other when facing bias-based verbal aggression. We analyzed a subset of the 2018-2019 Healthy Minds dataset ($N=7,291$) to test these social identity factors in college students’ intentions to intervene as well as their self-reported interventions in the past year. We compared the responses of students with minoritized racial, sexual, and gender identities with those of their White, straight, and cisgender peers. We also examined the effects of past experiences of discrimination, campus belonging, and social belonging. To our knowledge, this is the first quantitative study to assess correlations of social

identity and bias-based bullying intervention among college students.

Bias-Based Bullying and Verbal Aggression in College

Although bullying and cyberbullying are increasingly acknowledged to be prevalent and serious problems on college campuses, few studies to date have investigated bias-based bullying (Lund & Ross, 2017). Bias-based bullying is defined as interpersonal aggression, intimidation, and ostracism targeting someone's identity (Bucchianeri et al., 2016; Espelage, 2016; Hong, et al., 2018; Mulvey et al., 2018). Recent studies have shown persistently high rates of both in-person and digital aggression targeting college students with minoritized gender and sexual identities (Cassidy et al., 2021; Rivers, 2016) as well as high rates of victimization among African American and Hispanic adolescents (Musu et al., 2019). Among college students, studies on racialized bias-based aggression and bullying have tended to focus on the problem of microaggressions—subtle slights or invalidations (Harris, 2017; Ogunyemi et al., 2020). There is a dearth of direct scholarly attention on more overt racialized bias-based bullying, such as verbal aggression, toward older adolescents and college students of color (Jones et al., 2018; Mishna et al., 2018).

Bias-based verbal aggression may include racial, homophobic, and transphobic slurs and intimidating or harassing comments. Experiences of bias on campus, including verbal aggression, can contribute to depression, anxiety, feelings of isolation, and other adverse health and mental health outcomes, as well as undermine students' academic outcomes and sense of connection with their peers and school (Dahlen et al., 2013; Hwang & Goto, 2008;). A few studies have found that adolescents who experience bias-based bullying, especially targeting multiple intersectional social identities, report more negative psychosocial and academic outcomes than students who experience general bullying or bias-based aggression targeting only

one social identity (Bucchianeri et al., 2016; Mulvey et al., 2018). These consequences reflect higher rates of bullying for students with intersecting marginalized identities as well as a compounding effect of being targeted for multiple identities.

Peer Support as a Buffer for the Psychosocial Impacts of Bias-based Bullying

Emotional support from friends may be a key factor in resilience for adolescents and emerging adults facing peer aggression (Goldbaum et al., 2003). Holt and Espelage (2007) found in a cross-sectional study with middle and high school students that participants who were bullied but reported friend support expressed less anxiety and depression than others who had been victimized. In a four-year longitudinal study with adolescents, Yeung-Thompson and Leadbeater (2012) found that support from friends helped attenuate internalizing symptoms for victimized youth over time and that a baseline capacity to seek support from peers provided sustained protection against these internalizing effects from early adolescence through emerging adulthood. In older adolescence and emerging adulthood, friends and other peers may be able to support perspective-taking and affect regulation in ways that parents and teachers offer at earlier stages of development. Peers who express concern and interest in the wellbeing of someone being targeted may also help to counter attribution bias for the victimized person, particularly the perception that everyone around them approves of the aggression (Byers, 2013, 2016). Perceptions of peer responses may be especially charged in the context of bias-based bullying and aggression toward adolescents and emerging adults with minoritized identities.

The Role of Bystanders in Supporting Emerging Adults Facing Peer Aggression

Bullying is often framed from an ecological perspective to conceptualize the role of bystanders who witness the aggression and variously respond by encouraging it, ignoring it, or attempting to intervene (Salmivalli et al., 2011). There has been very little research on individual

practice-based interventions with children, adolescents, and emerging adults involved in bullying (Byers et al., 2019). However, there is an expansive and growing literature on how children and youth respond when witnessing bullying and cyberbullying, in part because peers in spatial or virtual proximity to the aggression are often a first and crucial voice of intervention (Jenkins & Troop-Gordon, 2020). Individuals who attempt to stop the aggression or support a targeted peer are often referred to as “upstanders” (Vera et al., 2019). We focus in this study on informal peer intervention, initiated by students themselves, as it may be especially relevant in adolescence and emerging adulthood (Byers, 2016; Holt and Espelage, 2007).

Research on allyship among college students has focused on responsiveness to sexual violence (Banyard, 2014), with recent and emerging scholarly attention on the role of social identity. While many factors are correlated with college student intervention, Hoxmeier and colleagues (2021) examined racial identity factors in intervention opportunities and responses to six sexual violence situations. They found that White students reported more opportunities to intervene, but that racial identity did not positively predict actual intervention. Asian students were significantly less likely to intend to intervene or actually intervene (Hoxmeier et al., 2021). Azimi and colleagues (2020) examined how sexual violence awareness programming and prior victimization were connected to bystander intervention, finding that being a student of color decreased the likelihood of bystander intervention by 30% compared to White students. They surmised that students of color may more commonly feel suspicious or nervous about law enforcement, contributing to lower likelihood of intervention.

Peer responsiveness to bias-based bullying may also be influenced by factors including campus climate and peer familiarity. Dessel and colleagues (2017) found in a study with heterosexual college students that being older, having more LGBT friends, taking relevant

courses, and having higher self-esteem predicted increased intention to intervene to help friends facing homophobic aggression. Conversely, Byers and Cerulli (2021) found that students without close proximity, relationships, or shared marginalized identities justified not intervening by saying that they were “out of the loop” or should “stay in their own lane” (p. 513). White students who witnessed racist aggression toward peers rationalized ignoring the aggression, even after reporting that they tried to help in other cases, because they feared being labeled a “White savior” (p. 513). These findings suggest that students with under-represented social identities who face bias-based verbal aggression may need to turn to each other for assistance.

The Present Study

We set out to examine whether college students with minoritized racial, sexual, and gender identities are more likely to intervene in verbal aggression. We also assessed whether these differences are moderated by the explanatory variables of perceived discrimination and sense of social and campus belonging. Based on the prior research on bullying intervention, identity-based helping, and linked fate theory, we hypothesized the following:

1. Students with minoritized racial, sexual, and gender identities will show a greater likelihood of intention to intervene and self-reported intervention in the past year than straight, cisgender, and White peers in response to witnessing bias-based verbal aggression on campus.

2. A higher sense of social belonging, campus belonging, and perceived discrimination in the past year will correlate with a greater likelihood of intention to intervene and reported intervention in the past year for students with minoritized racial, sexual, and gender identities.

Method

Study Design

We used data collected by The Healthy Minds Study (HMS) in the year 2018-2019 to

conduct a cross-sectional analysis using logistic regressions. HMS is an online, annual survey of college students coordinated by University of Michigan and Boston University since 2007 (Eisenberg & Lipson, 2019). The survey gathers data about students' mental health concerns, service utilization, and university experiences. Each year, the HMS produces an aggregate, national data report using data from all participating institutions. This data is available from the International Consortium of Social and Political Research (ICSPR) and is accessible for research purposes on request. While there are three core modules, institutions can also choose elective modules, including the two modules we analyzed on bystander and upstander behavior and campus culture and climate. Every student who receives the email with the survey has the option to respond or opt-out. Data are collected locally through Qualtrics and then sent to HMS.

The 2018-2019 survey reflected the experience of 62,171 students at 79 different institutions of higher education in both undergraduate and graduate programs. Participating institutions are overwhelming historically White, with only one Historically Black College/University noted in the overall 2018-2019 list. The expected return rate was 25% and in 2018-2019, the return rate was 17%. Adjustment was carried out for survey non-responders.

Our research team includes researchers who identify as South Asian and international, first-generation Mexican American, and White American and queer, cisgender female and male, and straight. Throughout analysis and writing we worked to maintain a critical perspective with reflexivity about our own positionalities. We repeatedly reflected on our aim to study identity-related helping patterns with sensitivity to the complex challenges individuals and groups face encountering bias-based aggression.

We created an analytic subset of the 2018-2019 HMS dataset including the respondents who completed the elective module on bystander/upstander responses. This subset has 23,903

students. A second filter further included only those students who indicated they had witnessed someone using hurtful, bias-based language on their campus. The analytic subset then consisted of 8,552 students. We used listwise deletion to manage data missing completely at random. The final analytical sample included 7,291 students. We compared both of these datasets using Chi-square and t-tests to see if the missing data changed the demographics of the sample. There were no significant differences, hence we did not do any further analysis for the missing data. See Table 1 for participant demographics.

Table 1.

Demographic Data (N = 7291)

Demographics	N	%
Gender Identity		
Cisgender Women	4942	67.8
Cisgender Men	2110	28.9
Transgender, genderqueer/ gender non-conforming, and self-identified	239	3.27
Sexual Identity*		
Heterosexual	5677	77.9
Lesbian	111	1.5
Gay	161	2.2
Bisexual	694	9.5
Queer	262	3.6
Questioning	158	2.2
Self-identified	206	2.8
Racial Identity*		
White	5941	81.5
African-American/Black	443	6.1
Asian American	623	8.5
Hispanic	619	8.5
American Indian/Alaskan Native	118	1.6

Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	50	0.7
Middle Eastern Arab/Arab American	124	1.7
Other Race	100	1.4
International Students	308	4.2
Asian international	157	2.2
Age	<i>M</i> = 21.13	

*Students could endorse more than one identity

Measures

Sociodemographic information. The HMS survey for 2018-2019 had 29-35 items related to the social characteristics of the participants, dependent upon which modules an institution selected and the responses of the students. Based upon the available demographic data, we created the following racial identity variables: Asian; African American and Black; White; Arab and Middle Eastern; Pacific Islander and Native Hawaiian; and American Indian and Alaska Native; as well as a variable for students who did not identify with these categories. On further exploration, we found a large proportion of students who identified as Asian were also international students. Because we found that Asian international students responded differently than Asian American students, we developed two variables: Asian American and Asian international. Fifty-one percent of the total number of international students in our analytic subsample were Asian international students. The numbers of international students who identified with other racial groups were not large enough to analyze.

The other sociodemographic questions we explored related to gender and sexual identities. The HMS survey currently asks for both assigned sex at birth and gender identity, however, because our focus is social identity, we only analyzed responses to gender identity. Students could choose one or more from the following list: Male; Female; Trans male/

Transman; Trans female/Trans woman; and Genderqueer/ Gender non-conforming. They could also write in another gender identity. For sexual identities, students could select one or more of the following: Heterosexual; Lesbian; Gay; Bisexual; Queer; and Questioning. They could also write in an additional sexual identity. We created variables for minoritized sexual identities (participants not identifying as heterosexual) and minoritized gender identities (participants not identifying as cisgender). The analytic subsample included 1,752 students identified with minoritized sexual identities and 239 also identified with minoritized gender identities. Two-hundred and seventeen identified with sexually minoritized identities, while 22 identified as transgender and straight. We compared responses of cisgender sexually minoritized participants and those who are minoritized in both sexual and gender identities and found no differences in responses to our dependent variables. In consideration of many shared experiences across these groups we created one variable for sexually and gender minoritized (SGM) students. Garvey and colleagues (2019) raise important concerns about how the use of analytic constructs such as SGM can obscure complex differences rooted in gender and sexuality. We employed the SGM concept in this case because experiences of minoritized sexuality and gender are frequently entangled by history, coalitional identity, and community formation. Additionally, homophobia and transphobia can often be interrelated. We also chose SGM as an analytic category given our hypothesis that students with minoritized gender and sexual identities might be responsive to each other because of a sense of shared struggle and linked fate even across differences.

Explanatory variables. The variables measured included intention to intervene, self-reported past intervention, perceived discrimination, social belonging, and campus belonging.

Intention to intervene. The variable of hypothetical intervention was created based upon student responses to one question. Students were asked, “If I saw someone was using hurtful

language (e.g., bullying, sexist, racist, or homophobic comments), I would intervene (by trying to help).” Possible responses fell on a 6-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating strongly agree and 6 indicating strongly disagree. Responses that included strongly agree, agree, and somewhat agree were identified as “yes” and responses that included somewhat disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree were identified as “no” to create the binary variable intention to intervene.

Self-reported past intervention. The variable that aimed to measure self-reported past intervention was created based upon student responses to two questions. 1) Students were asked to indicate if “in the past year, I have intervened (by trying to help) in the following situations on my campus: someone was using hurtful language (e.g., bullying, sexist, racist, or homophobic comments).” 2) Students were also asked to indicate if “in the past year, I witnessed the following risky or difficult situations on my campus but did not intervene: someone was using hurtful language (e.g., bullying, sexist, racist, or homophobic comments).” A binary variable of actual intervention was created with “yes” indicating students who had intervened and “no” indicating students who denied intervening. Students who endorsed both questions, or neither, were not included in this study.

Perceived discrimination. A single item measure was used to understand self-perceived discrimination. Students were asked “in the past 12 months, how many times have you been treated unfairly because of your race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or cultural background?” The perceived discrimination variable was measured on a 6-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating “never” and 6 indicating “almost all the time.”

Social belonging. Student experience of connection with others was measured using two questions from the Flourishing Scale (Diener et al., 2009) in the HMS Survey. The questions were each assessed with a 6-point Likert scale indicating agreement. The questions were 1) “my

social relationships are supportive and rewarding” and 2) “I actively contribute to the happiness and well-being of others.” These were made into a single item scale called social belonging.

Campus belonging. Student experience of connection with their campus was measured with two questions adapted from the Sense of Social and Academic Fit Scale in the HMS survey (Walton & Cohen, 2007). The questions were each assessed with a 6-point Likert scale indicating agreement. The questions were 1) “How much do you agree with the following statement—I fit in well at my school,” and 2) “How much do you agree with the following statement—I feel isolated from campus life.” These two questions were made into a single item scale called campus belonging.

Analytic Strategy

The variables were analyzed using IBM SPSS v.28. Descriptive statistics and logistic regression were used to investigate relationships between variables. The independent variables were demographics, specifically racial, sexual, and gender identities. The outcome variables were intention to intervene and self-reported intervention in the past 12 months. A second model was run to include the additional explanatory variables of perceived discrimination, social belonging, and campus belonging to determine how they might influence likelihood of self-reported past intervention or intention to intervene in the future.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The sample included 7,291 students who had witnessed hurtful language on their campus in the past year. Of this sample, 5,941 (81.5%) identified as White, 443 (6.1%) identified as African American, 623 (8.5%) identified as Asian American, 619 (8.5%) identified as Hispanic, 118 (1.7%) identified as American Indian and Alaskan Native, 50 (0.7%) identified as Native

Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, 124 (1.7%) identified as Middle Eastern and Arab, and 100 (1.4%) identified as other race. Students who selected the “other” category often also checked additional options and wrote in a preferred identification such as South Asian or North African. A total of 630 students (9.1%) selected multiple racial identities and were included in the variables they identified. For this analysis we chose to keep the variables based on specific disclosed racial identities rather than form a broad multiracial category. Only 308 students (4.2%) identified as international students including 2.2% ($n = 157$) who identified as both international and Asian. Additionally, 2,110 (28.9%) identified as men while 4,942 (67.8%) identified as women and 1,752 (24%) endorsed minoritized sexual and/or gender identity (SGM). See Table 1 for descriptive statistics.

The analytic sample provided robust categories for intent to intervene and self-reported past intervention. For hypothetical intervention, 4,724 (64.8%) students said that they would try to help or otherwise intervene if they witnessed verbal aggression on campus. As for self-reported past intervention, 3,514 (48.2%) said they had witnessed verbal aggression on campus and had intervened, and 2,075 (28.5%) said that they witnessed verbal aggression but did not report intervening.

Data Analysis

Multiple logistic regressions were carried out to examine differences among the independent variables and two dependent variables. These are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2.

Logistic Regression for Intention to Intervene in Verbal Aggression (N = 7291)

<u>Model 1</u> (Demographic Variables)	<u>Model 2</u> (Explanatory Variables Added)
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Variable								
	Coefficient (SE)	Wald	p	OR	Coefficient (SE)	Wald	p	OR
Constant	.66 (.04)	337.65	<.001	1.93	-.83 (.16)	26.94	<.001	0.44
African-American/ Black	.19 (.11)	3.03	0.08	1.20	.17 (.11)	2.40	0.12	1.18
Asian American	.15 (.10)	2.26	0.13	0.86	-.18 (.10)	3.07	0.08	0.84
Hispanic	.19 (.09)*	4.25	0.04	1.20	.21 (.09)*	5.27	0.02	1.24
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	-.08(0.3)	0.08	0.78	0.92	-.09 (.30)	0.09	0.76	0.91
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	.25 (.21)	1.48	0.22	1.29	.33 (.21)	2.53	0.11	1.39
Middle Eastern Arab/ Arab American	.30 (.20)	2.28	0.13	1.35	.42 (.21)*	4.14	0.04	1.52
Other Race	-.04 (.21)	0.04	0.84	0.96	-.04 (.22)	0.03	0.86	0.96
Asian international	-.61 (.19)***	10.56	<.001	0.54	-.56 (.19)**	8.64	0.003	0.57
Cisgender Men	-.35 (.05)***	42.75	<.001	0.70	-.30 (.06)***	29.24	<.001	0.74
Sexual and Gender Minoritized	.22 (.06)***	13.43	<.001	1.24	.31 (.06)***	24.31	<.001	1.36
Campus Belonging	---	---	---	---	.22 (.03)***	72.14	<.001	1.25
Perceived Discrimination (last 12 months)	---	---	---	---	.12 (.03)***	17.38	<.001	1.12
Social Belonging	---	---	---	---	.14 (.03)***	28.48	<.001	1.15
Pseudo R ²		0.014			0.04			
-2 Log likelihood		9355.116 ^a			9165.399 ^b			

Note: *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

^a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 3 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

^b. Estimation terminated at iteration number 4 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

Table 3.

Logistic Regression for self-Reported Past Intervention to Verbal Aggression (N = 7291)

Model 1 (Demographic Variables)	Model 2 (Explanatory Variables Added)
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Variable	Coefficient (SE)	Wald	p	OR	Coefficient (SE)	Wald	p	OR
Constant	-0.08 (.03)	6.07	.01	0.92	-1.28 (.16)	66.13	<.001	0.28
African-American/ Black	.12 (.10)	1.53	.22	1.13	-.02 (.10)	0.02	.88	0.98
Asian American	-.11 (.10)	1.35	.24	0.89	-.25 (.10)*	6.09	.01	0.78
Hispanic	-.01 (.09)	0.01	.94	0.99	-.06 (.09)	0.43	.51	0.94
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	.10 (.29)	0.12	.73	1.10	.06 (.29)	0.04	.84	1.06
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	.35 (.19)	3.44	.06	1.42	.36 (.19)	3.55	.06	1.43
Middle Eastern Arab/ Arab American	.08 (.18)	0.18	.67	1.08	.07 (.19)	0.12	.72	1.07
Other Race	.00 (.20)	0.00	.99	1.00	-.14 (.21)	0.47	.49	0.87
Asian international	-.42 (.19)*	4.83	.03	0.65	-.42 (.20)*	4.61	.03	0.66
Cisgender Men	-.20 (.05)***	14.00	<.001	0.82	-.11 (.05)*	4.43	.03	0.90
Sexual and Gender Minoritized	.30 (.06)***	28.90	<.001	1.35	.28 (.06)***	22.53	<.001	1.32
Campus Belonging	---	---	---	---	.11 (.03)***	19.18	<.001	1.12
Perceived Discrimination (last 12 months)	---	---	---	---	.31 (.03)***	133.21	<.001	1.36
Social Belonging	---	---	---	---	.14 (.03)***	32.51	<.001	1.15
Pseudo R ²				0.009				0.036
-2 Log likelihood				10029.377 ^a				9829.112 ^b

Note: *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

^a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 3 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

^b. Estimation terminated at iteration number 4 because parameter estimates changed by less than .001.

A first set of tests assessed if there was a difference in intention to intervene in verbal aggression (Table 2 Model 1) and self-reported past intervention (Table 3 Model 1) based on demographic variables of racial, gender, and SGM identity. A second set of tests were run to assess if outcomes stayed the same or changed for intention to intervene (Table 2 Model 2) and

self-reported past intervention (Table 3 Model 2) when explanatory variables were added.

A pseudo R^2 statistic was utilized as a goodness of fit measure of variance explained for each model. As shown in Table 2, 1.4% variance was explained in Model 1 while 4.0% variance was explained in Model 2. In Table 3, 0.9% of variance was explained in Model 1 while 3.6% variance was explained in Model 2. The R^2 statistic indicates that Model 2 in both Tables 2 and 3 with explanatory independent variables added are the better fit models. We found that demographic variables do not explain the whole story and that added explanatory variables contribute to the findings in a significant way.

A moderation analysis was carried out to see if the explanatory variables (perceived discrimination, social belonging, and campus belonging) moderate the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. We found no interaction effects for perceived discrimination, social belonging, and campus belonging and the intention to intervene or self-reported past intervention. The only main effects are detailed in Tables 2 and 3 below. We also conducted analysis to study the intersectionality of racial identity and SGM identity in relation to intent to intervene or reported intervention, however this did not show any interaction effects.

Racial identity findings. While controlling for all other variables, students who identified as Hispanic and Arab/Middle Eastern showed a significantly higher intention to intervene if they witnessed verbal aggression on campus. Students who identified as both Asian and international showed significantly lower likelihood of intention to intervene (Table 2 Model 2). Asian American and Asian international students were also less likely to report intervening in the last year. There were no significant differences found for reported past intervention based on racial identity (Table 3 Model 2).

Although Hispanic-identified students were 24% more likely (OR 1.24) to show intention

to intervene as compared to those students who identified as White ($p = .02$), they did not respond differently than their White peers in the self-reported intervention model. Students who identified as Asian American did not show a significant difference in their intention to intervene but were 21.8% less likely to report having intervened ($p = .01$) (Table 3 Model 2). Asian international students were significantly less likely to show intention to intervene ($p = .003$) and were 34% less likely to report having intervened ($p = .03$) (Table 2 Model 2 and Table 3 Model 2).

Cisgender identity findings. Cisgender men showed a significantly lower likelihood of intention to intervene. They were 10.7% less likely to self-report intervening in the verbal aggression as compared to cisgender women ($p = .03$) (Table 2 Model 2 and Table 3 Model 2).

SGM findings. The students who identified as SGM showed a higher likelihood to report that they would intervene in bullying if they witnessed it on campus. They also reported having actually intervened in verbal aggression in the last year more than their cisgender and straight-identified peers. SGM students showed a significantly higher likelihood of intention to intervene in bullying ($p < .001$) and 32% increased likelihood (OR 1.32) to self-report intervening as compared to non-SGM students ($p < .001$). (See Table 3 Model 2 for details.)

Explanatory variable regression findings. Higher rates of campus belonging, social belonging, and perceived discrimination were significantly associated with an increased likelihood of intention to intervene in verbal aggression (see Table 2 Model 2) and an increased likelihood to self-report having intervened over the past year (see Table 3 Model 2). For every one unit increase in campus belonging, students were 12% more likely (OR 1.12) to report intervention in the past year ($p < .001$). For every one unit increase in experiences of perceived discrimination, students were 36% more likely (OR 1.36) to self-report having intervened in

verbal aggression ($p < .001$). For every one unit increase in social belonging, participants were 15% more likely (OR 1.15) to report intervention in the past year ($p < .001$). Once the explanatory variables were added, only the Asian (OR 0.84) and Asian international (OR 0.57) students continued to show significantly lower intent to intervene (Table 2 Model 2). The Hispanic-identified (OR 1.24) and Arab and Middle Eastern (OR 1.52) students showed a higher intent to intervene. This picture was again different in Table 3 where only the Asian (OR 0.78) and Asian international (OR 0.66) students showed significant lower self-reported intervention. Cisgender men continued to show significantly lower intent to intervene (OR 0.74) and reported intervention (OR 0.89) even when the explanatory variables were added. SGM students continued to express a higher intent to intervene (OR 1.36) and reported intervening (OR 1.32) more frequently in both models.

Discussion

Across racial identities, students with minoritized genders and sexualities were 36% more likely to intend to intervene and 32% more likely to report intervening in the past year when witnessing verbal aggression toward peers than straight and cisgender students. This finding partially supports our first hypothesis. It is possible that coming to identify with minoritized sexualities and genders may have a specific influence on this type of prosocial helping. Classical models of gay and lesbian identity development have stressed differentiation from previous self-concepts, family of origin, and larger peer networks—an active claiming of identity where the role of peer support may be particularly important (Cass, 1979). This linear typology has been usefully critiqued for its presumption of essentializing, fixed, singular, and decontextualized identity and inattention to intersectionality (Langdrige, 2014). Conceptualizations of sexual and gender identity development in more fluid, contingent, as well as racialized terms, however, also

tend to describe a reconstitution and realignment of sense of self including a potentially affirmative identification with difference rather than with the mainstream (Duran & Jones, 2020). This effect may be similar to what Unger (1998) called “positive marginality”—a psychosocial identification with difference enabling critical awareness in the context of feminist activist identity development. In some cases, identity development around minoritized sexuality and gender may become rooted in prosocial engagement, a process facilitated through online networking resources and campus groups (Craig & McInroy, 2014).

Findings for straight and cisgender identified students of color and White students are more mixed. Hispanic and Arab and Middle Eastern identified students were more likely to report intending to help than White students, but no more likely to report having intervened. This discrepancy between intentions to help and reports of actual helping may suggest that although Hispanic and Arab and Middle Eastern identified students are more likely than White students to believe they should support targeted peers, they may not feel able, adequately supported, or confident to do so. They may also feel vulnerable to racialized retaliative aggression and therefore reason they cannot risk trying to help peers. A similar reasoning may explain why the relatively small subsample of Asian international students were less likely to express an intent to intervene or report intervening. Some international students may be unfamiliar with the social identity dynamics of the United States. Factors such as cultural distance, cultural shock, lack of social support, fear of hostility towards immigrants, and apprehension about getting involved with campus police or the legal system may lead these students to take a backseat when it comes to intervening (Yeo et al., 2019). Findings are consistent with recent research about racial identity and college students’ responsiveness to sexual violence (Azimi et al., 2021; Hoxmeier et al., 2021). We note that cisgender and straight Black and African American students did not

intervene at higher rates than cisgender and straight White students.

We hypothesized higher rates of peer intervention among students with minoritized racial identities under the assumption that shared experiences of marginality and oppression would contribute to a sense of accountability to the group (Byers & Cerulli, 2021; Gay & Tate, 1998; Simien, 2005). As Shelley and colleagues (2021) observe, students with minoritized racial identities may feel less confident in the support of school authorities, and this might in turn discourage interventions. Another related factor may be racial battle fatigue—the physical, mental, and emotional stress of coping with daily microaggressions and racial incidents for people of color (Harris, 2017). This may contribute to feelings of exhaustion and disengagement. On historically and still predominantly White campuses, many students of color may also feel hyper-visible and vulnerable, discouraging prosocial intervention. They may also be less likely to try to help when they see White students failing to respond.

Importantly, while perceived discrimination and sense of belonging are associated with intervention, there is no moderating effect on intervention rates for students with minoritized racial, sexual, or gender identities. Although these students experience more discrimination and a more complex sense of belonging, our analysis points to important additional identity group-related effects influencing peer intervention that must be better understood. These may include, for example, confidence in informal and formal social and environmental supports.

With growing concern about bias-based bullying on campuses nationally, it is vital for campus leaders to facilitate and support peer responsiveness and interpersonal care. Credible peer support is a crucial buffer against the harm of bias-based aggression, but this study's findings show that bystander responsiveness to peer aggression can be textured and uneven. Campus leaders can use these findings to offer a mirror for students in discussions during

orientation and throughout the year. Linder (2019) calls on campus leaders to draw on a “power-conscious and intersectional framework,” recognizing how students with minoritized identities often take on activist roles because of their marginality and may experience the stakes of this work in complex personal and collective terms. This would include opportunities for students to think critically together about the role of social identity, power, and oppression in helping responses, as well as forums for White students to consider how their privilege influences their responses when they witness peers being targeted. We recommend facilitated discussions among students in minoritized groups about challenges to within-group support and the ways histories of exclusion and marginalization on campuses may play a role in supporting and discouraging peer support. Naming the important role of informal and improvisational peer responsiveness, and the dynamic challenges to it, is crucial for building community capacity and expectations for care in the face of bias-based aggression.

Limitations

In developing our variables, we could only compare students who identified solely as intervening or not intervening. We could not account for the individuals who indicated that they both intervened and did not intervene or students who failed to respond to items about intervention despite witnessing verbal aggression. Further study may point to situations and interactions that facilitate or discourage helping. Given the complexity of measuring multiracial identity, where some multiracial individuals identify with one race over others and change how they view their racial identities across time (Parker et al., 2015), this study did not examine the relationship between identifying as multiracial and bystander response, but instead examined the effect of each identified race. Future research should examine the impact of being multiracial on bystander response to see if the findings of this study continue to hold true. Selection bias is also

likely because the study relies on self report, schools had the option to elect modules, and students had the option to complete questions or not. Students who are interested in these issues are more likely to participate. Finally, as a cross sectional secondary analysis, we can only speculate about the reasons for non-responsiveness, for example bias, lack of willingness, fear, fatigue, or lack of skill. Nevertheless, our analysis points to strong social identity effects independent of available explanatory variables.

Conclusion

Informal peer support is essential for reducing aggression and promoting resilience in the face of bias-based bullying among college students. Although current bystander intervention models may provide tools for encouraging more prosocial responsiveness within campus communities, our findings show that not all students are equally likely or able to take action. Across racial identities, students with minoritized gender and sexual identities appear to respond more actively to peer aggression. Students with minoritized racial identities who are straight and cisgender may be least likely to find support from peers with shared identities when they face verbal aggression. Bystander intervention must begin with and center the needs and experiences of students in minoritized groups. Campus programming must work to build trust and improve expectations that bias-based aggression will be taken seriously.

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