



## The influence of norms and social identities on children's responses to bullying

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**Background.** Research on bullying increasingly focuses on social processes, showing that group membership affects children's responses to bullying scenarios. Additionally, correlational research has shown links between norms of cooperation and prosocial behaviour, and between competition and more aggressive forms of behaviour.

**Aims.** This paper focuses on how children's peer group membership affects their group-based emotions in response to an intergroup bullying incident, and the action tendencies that these emotions predict, in the context of different background norms (for competitive or cooperative behaviour).

**Sample.** Italian schoolchildren, 10–13 years old ( $N = 128$ , 65 males) took part in this study.

**Methods.** Participants were randomly assigned to the group of a perpetrator, target, or third-party group member described in a scenario. Next, they played a game designed to induce a cooperative, competitive, or neutral norm, and read the scenario. They then answered a questionnaire measuring their group-based emotions.

**Results.** Results underscored the role of norms and group processes in responses to bullying. In particular, children exposed to a cooperative norm expressed less pride and more regret and anger about the bullying than those in other conditions.

**Conclusions.** This study indicates that the influence peer groups have on bullying may be tempered by the introduction of a cooperative normative context to the school setting.

Perspectives on bullying are changing. Increasingly, the focus of research is broadening out from the dyadic relationship between a perpetrator and a target to consider the impact of peer groups and normative context on reactions to bullying. Specifically, researchers have suggested that cooperative norms, rather than competitive ones, may reduce bullying in schools (e.g., Naylor & Cowie, 1999; Rigby, 2007). Evidence

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supports this hypothesis: Rivers and Soutter (1996) showed that a school with a strong cooperative norm had low levels of bullying. However, to our knowledge there is no experimental evidence concerning the role that normative context plays in bullying.

Within the school context, processes operating at the peer-group level have been shown experimentally to influence bullying behaviour (see, Duffy & Nesdale, 2009; Gini, 2006, 2007, 2008; Jones, Haslam, York, & Ryan, 2008; Jones, Manstead, & Livingstone, 2009; Ojala & Nesdale, 2004). These studies show that group processes influence how children feel and act in bullying scenarios. Here we build upon this research by examining how children's responses to a bullying episode are affected not only by their peer group, but also by a wider normative context of cooperation or competition.

### **The social identity approach**

Given the social nature of many bullying episodes (e.g., Atlas & Pepler, 1998), research has begun to focus on group processes. This research has tended to use a social identity approach (Duffy & Nesdale, 2009; Gini, 2006, 2007, 2008; Jones *et al.*, 2008; Jones *et al.*, 2009). Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) assumes that part of an individual's identity derives from membership of social groups. People are motivated to find positive differences between their own group and other groups (Ellemers, Spears & Doosje, 1997). Social-identity mechanisms are important because they affect emotional reactions to bullying, and the subsequent desire to act. *Group-based emotions* (for a review, see Iyer & Leach, 2008) are those that take groups rather than individuals as the subject and object of the emotion (Parkinson, Fischer, & Manstead, 2005). For example, Gordijn, Yzerbyt, Wigboldus, and Dumont (2006) found that participants experienced more group-based anger when a shared identity with the targets of a harmful act was made salient.

Jones *et al.* (2009) demonstrated a link between group-based emotions, action tendencies, and group membership in the context of bullying. They showed that pride was associated with a tendency to affiliate with a bullying group, whereas regret was associated with a propensity to apologize to the target, and anger with a propensity to tell an adult about the incident. Moreover, group-based emotions were linked to the perceived responsibility of a bullying group for the incident, such that more conciliatory emotions (i.e., relatively high shame and low pride) were displayed where responsibility was perceived as low. In line with past research (e.g., Nesdale, Durkin, Maass, & Griffiths, 2005), the intensity of group-based emotional reactions was also influenced by the extent to which children *identified* with a group, such that those who identified highly with the group showed more intense emotional reactions.

Thus, it has been established that group membership has an influence on group-based emotional reactions to bullying, and that this influence is moderated by both the extent to which a child identifies with a group, and the responsibility that the group is perceived to have for the bullying incident.

### **Social norm**

To explain why bullying in and between groups continues over time, researchers have also focused on the norms of the groups to which bullies belong (e.g., Ojala & Nesdale, 2004). Jones *et al.* (2009) showed that group norms moderate the effect of peer group membership on group-based emotions pertinent to a bullying episode, and Mercer, McMillen, and De Rosier (2009) showed that aggressive classroom norms predicted

increases in aggressive behaviour over the school year (see also Sentse, Scholte, Salmivalli, & Voeten, 2007).

Wider normative contexts have received less attention with regard to bullying, despite the conjecture that a competitive, achievement-orientated norm – as defined in the ethos of a particular school, for example – may lead to higher levels of bullying, whereas cooperative norms may reduce its incidence (see Rigby, 2007). One way in which competitive or cooperative norms can be established is through structured play. Bay-Hinitz, Peterson, and Quilitch (1994) observed children after they had played cooperative or competitive games. Prosocial behaviour increased following cooperative games, whereas aggressive behaviour decreased; the reverse pattern emerged after competitive games (see also Garaigordobil, Maganto, & Exteberria, 1996).

Despite mounting evidence that peer group norms are relevant to bullying, none of these studies has investigated the impact of the wider normative context on children's interpretation of a bullying scenario, or on their subsequent emotional reactions. Moreover, prior studies have not examined the role of group membership as a potential moderator of the effect of normative context.

### **The present study**

We explored the roles of social identity processes, normative context, and group-based emotions in perceptions of and responses to bullying. Ten- to thirteen-year-olds were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: to the same group as someone later described as engaging in bullying (the perpetrator's group); to the same group as someone later described as being the target of that bullying (the target's group); or to a third-party group. Children then read a gender-matched scenario, in which a perpetrator acts unkindly towards a target who belongs to a different group. The norm (competitive, cooperative, or neutral) was manipulated by varying a game that participants played prior to reading this scenario. Children rated the perpetrator's responsibility for the events described. Further, each child's identification with his or her group was measured, along with group-based emotions pertinent to bullying (pride, regret, and anger), and the action tendencies associated with each of these (affiliate with the perpetrator, apologize to the target, and tell a teacher respectively).

On the basis of the prior research outlined above, we reasoned that group membership would affect children's emotions in response to the bullying, such that children in the perpetrator's group would report more positive and less negative emotion than their counterparts in the other groups; however, we also expected that these effects of group membership would be moderated by the wider normative context, and by strength of identification with the group. Furthermore, we explored the effect of perceived responsibility for the unkind behaviour as another potential moderator of the effects of group membership. We also expected that specific emotions would predict their associated action tendencies.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants ( $N = 128$ ) were recruited from schools in Northern Italy. Informed parental consent was obtained prior to the collection of data. No parent asked that their child should not take part. Sixty-five participants were male and 63 were female. Participants were aged 10–13 years ( $M = 11.55$ ,  $SD = 0.61$ ). Forty-three pupils were attending primary

school, and 85 were attending middle school. Pupils were randomly allocated to the experimental conditions. Forty-two were assigned to the competitive norm condition, 38 to the cooperative norm condition, and 48 to the neutral norm condition. Forty-three were assigned to the perpetrator's group, 47 to the target's group, and 38 to the third-party group.

### **Design**

The study had a fully between-subjects factorial design, where the factors were the *normative context* to which children were exposed (competitive, cooperative, or neutral), and the *group membership* of participants (shared with the target [target's group], shared with the perpetrator [perpetrator's group], or shared with neither target nor perpetrator [third-party group]). The extent to which participants identified with their assigned group and the extent to which the perpetrator was perceived as responsible for the incident were measured as potential moderators of the effects of group membership and norm. The dependent variables were (a) group-based emotions and (b) action tendencies (to affiliate with the perpetrator, to apologize to the target, or to tell an adult what had happened).

### **Materials and procedure**

The study was conducted in school classrooms, one class group at a time. A teacher and two other adults were always present. Experimental sessions, conducted in Italian, began with an explanation that the researchers were interested in finding out about children's friendship groups. The activities in which children would take part were then described, and children were reminded that their participation was voluntary.

#### *Group membership manipulation*

Children were randomly allocated to one of the experimental groups. This was done using a dot estimation task (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971) and followed the same procedure as Jones *et al.* (2009). The researcher then exchanged each participant's guesses for a response slip assigning them, at random, to a particular (gender consistent) group, bearing the name of one of the scenario characters (with one character for each level of group membership) and providing information about that group. Membership of each group was indicated by a response slip stating, 'Your guesses tended to be too low. Most children in [child's name's group] also tend to make guesses that are too low. [Child's name's group] are an [active/fun-loving/bright] group of [girls/boys], who [enjoy listening to music together/watching DVDs together/playing games together]'. These descriptions were designed to encourage participants to identify with their group, and participants were instructed to go to a particular place in the classroom to join their other group members.

#### *Normative context*

This was manipulated by varying the content of a game in which they participated. There were three different games, each supervised by an adult. A *competitive* norm was established in a game in which a fish-shaped piece of paper was given to each participant, who was then asked to race it against other group members along a corridor, using only a sheet of newspaper. A *cooperative* norm was established in a game in which

participants were asked to stand, to form a tight circle, and, in turn, to allow one of their group members to stand in the centre of the circle and to fall backwards onto other group members. Those in the *neutral* norm condition were asked to sit in a circle, and take turns to point to another group member, but while doing so to say their own name. The child who was pointed at would then choose another child to continue the game.

### Scenarios

Children then read one scenario. This described a named member of the target's group, a named member of the perpetrator's group, a named member of the third-party group, and an incident that could be construed as bullying. Names of the scenario characters were chosen such that no child at the school went by them. The scenario described preparations for a drawing competition. This was followed by a bullying incident that was consistent with Nesdale and Scarlett's (2004, p. 428) definition of bullying as 'the delivery of aversive stimuli to weaker, less powerful persons', in which a named member of the perpetrator's group sabotages the work of a named member of the target's group. The scenario ended by making it clear that the target was upset (see the Appendix).

### Questionnaires

Before the questionnaire was completed, the researcher highlighted her interest in pupils' opinions about the story. It was stressed that answers would be kept private, and not read by school staff. There were two versions of the questionnaire, one for female participants and one for male participants (only the names and gender pronouns differed across the male and female scenarios). Children were asked to indicate their agreement to statements on 6-point Likert-type scales, ranging from 1 (*absolutely not*) to 6 (*absolutely*), by placing a tick at the relevant point on the scale.

A first set of items asked participants to confirm their group membership, the game they had played, and what they considered to be the aim of the game. There followed some practice items, to familiarize children with the scales. The next items were a 4-item identification scale: 'I am happy to be in my group', 'I would be sad if others said something bad about people in my group', 'My group is important to me', and 'I feel close to other members of my group' ( $\alpha = .50$ ). These items were derived from Cameron's (2004) measure.

The final paragraph of the scenario, describing the bullying incident, was then repeated. Following this, eight items called for judgements of the behaviour and whether the behaviour of the named perpetrator and of the perpetrator's group was bullying, for example, '[Perpetrator] is bullying [target]'. Among these eight items was a measure of the perceived responsibility of the perpetrator for the incident, '[Perpetrator] is to blame'.

The next items measured emotions. One item measured pride in the behaviour, 'I felt good about the way in which [perpetrator] behaved towards [target]'; one measured anger about the behaviour, 'I feel angry about the way that [perpetrator] behaved towards [target]'; and one item measured regret 'I feel sorry for the way that [perpetrator] behaved towards [target]'. Participants' *action tendencies* were measured by asking children to say what they would have done had they been present when the incident took place. Three action tendencies were intended to map directly to the emotions of pride, anger and regret; 'I would join in with [perpetrator] and his or her group' for pride; 'I would tell the teacher about what happened' for anger; and 'I would say sorry to [target]' for regret. Other action tendencies concerned plausible reactions that were not of central

concern to the research hypotheses. Finally, participants were asked to indicate their age and year group.

At the conclusion of the session, which lasted approximately 1 hour, participants were debriefed. Any questions were addressed by the researchers, and pupils were reminded of positive strategies for dealing with bullying. Participants were thanked and received sweets for their participation.

## **Results**

### **Data screening**

Data were screened for patterns in missing values, for outliers, and for violations of the assumptions for Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Scores on all continuous variables were transformed to *z*-scores prior to analysis.

### **Normative context manipulation check**

Participants answered the question 'What do you think was the aim of the game you just played?' by selecting one response from 'to be competitive', 'to be cooperative', or 'for fun'. Eighty percent of children passed this check, which is greater than the number than would be expected by chance,  $\chi^2_2 = 13.02, p = .001$ . Running the analyses with and without those who did not see the behaviour as bullying revealed no substantive differences in results. All children were retained for subsequent analyses.

### **Was the behaviour seen as bullying?**

Children indicated the extent to which they saw the behaviour of the perpetrator as bullying. Analysis revealed that 92% of participants agreed ('yes' or 'yes - a little'), or strongly agreed ('absolutely yes') with the statement, '[Perpetrator] is a bully', again a much higher percentage than would be expected by chance,  $\chi^2_5 = 101.24, p < .001$ . Running the analyses with and without those who did not see the behaviour as bullying revealed no substantive differences in results. All children were retained for subsequent analyses.

### **Group-based emotions**

To examine how the manipulated and measured variables affected the emotions children reported after reading the scenarios, each emotion was submitted in turn to a 3 (group membership: perpetrator's group, target's group, third party)  $\times$  3 (normative context: competitive, cooperative, neutral)  $\times$  responsibility (measured)  $\times$  identification with assigned group (measured) ANOVA, with the last two factors entered as continuous predictors. Where appropriate, ANOVAs were broken down using simple effects analysis, which investigated effects at +1 or -1 standard deviation from the mean of the continuous factors. Running the above ANOVAs including gender and year group as additional independent variables revealed no effects associated with these factors, which were dropped from the analyses reported below. Mean scores, standard deviations, and correlations between the dependent variables are given in Table 1.

### *Pride*

There were several significant lower order interactions that were qualified by a four-way interaction between group membership, normative context, identification, and

**Table 1.** Mean scores and standard deviations for, and correlations between, main dependent variables (before z-scoring)

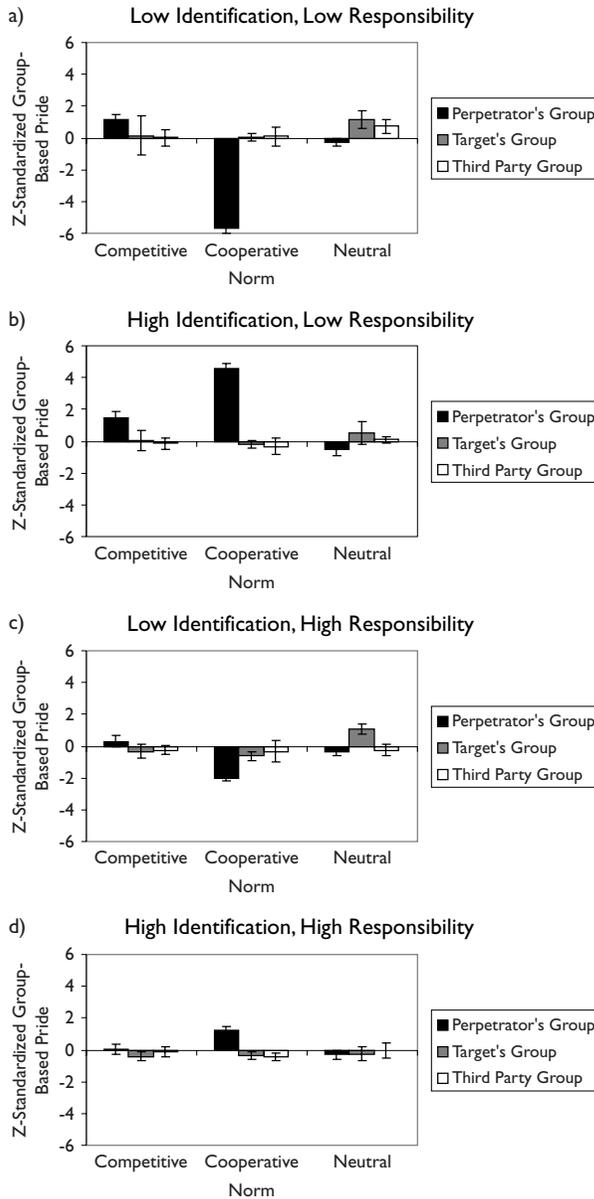
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
<i>M</i>	4.97	5.02	1.43	4.78	4.30	1.48	5.23	4.74
<i>SD</i>	0.63	1.01	0.84	1.35	1.49	0.77	0.84	1.40
1. Identification with assigned group		.096	-.023	.325 <sup>†</sup>	.156	-.169	.217 <sup>†</sup>	.274 <sup>†</sup>
2. Perpetrator's responsibility			-.392 <sup>†</sup>	.279 <sup>†</sup>	.319 <sup>†</sup>	-.118	.327 <sup>†</sup>	.034
3. Group-based pride				-.450 <sup>†</sup>	-.369 <sup>†</sup>	.143	-.450 <sup>†</sup>	-.085
4. Group-based regret					.313 <sup>†</sup>	-.249 <sup>†</sup>	.413 <sup>†</sup>	.161
5. Group-based anger						-.244 <sup>†</sup>	.510 <sup>†</sup>	.222 <sup>*</sup>
6. Affiliating with perpetrator							-.335 <sup>†</sup>	-.358 <sup>†</sup>
7. Apologize to target								.210 <sup>*</sup>
8. Action against perpetrator								

\*  $p < 0.05$ .†  $p < 0.01$ .

responsibility,  $F(4, 83) = 8.87$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .299$ . This interaction is illustrated in Figure 1. Further analysis showed that the three-way interaction between group membership, normative context, and identification was significant when levels of perceived responsibility were low (see panels a and b of Figure 1),  $F(4, 83) = 8.47$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .290$ , but not when perceived responsibility was high,  $F < 1$ . In turn, the two-way interaction between group membership and normative context was significant at low levels of perceived responsibility when identification was low (panel a of Figure 1),  $F(4, 83) = 8.32$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .286$ , and when identification was high,  $F(4, 83) = 10.66$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .339$  (panel b of Figure 1).

Simple effects analyses of the pride data showed that when identification was low and responsibility was low (panel a of Figure 1), there was a main effect of group membership in the competitive,  $F(2, 83) = 4.18$ ,  $p = .019$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .091$ , and cooperative,  $F(2, 83) = 10.90$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .208$ , conditions. In the competitive condition, this effect was driven by significant differences between (a) the perpetrator's and target's groups ( $M_s = 1.16$  and  $0.15$ , respectively) and (b) the perpetrator's and third-party groups ( $M_s = 1.16$  and  $0.01$ , respectively). In both cases, children in the perpetrator's group reported more pride than their counterparts in the other groups. In the cooperative condition, this effect was driven by significant differences between (a) the perpetrator's and target's groups ( $M_s = -5.68$  and  $0.06$ , respectively), and (b) the perpetrator's and third-party groups ( $M_s = -5.68$  and  $0.08$ , respectively). In both cases, children in the perpetrator's group reported less pride than their counterparts in the other groups.

When identification was high and responsibility was low (panel b of Figure 1) there was a main effect of group membership in the competitive,  $F(2, 83) = 5.62$ ,  $p = .005$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .119$ , and cooperative,  $F(2, 83) = 24.57$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .372$ , conditions. In the competitive condition, this effect was driven by significant differences between (a) the perpetrator's and target's groups ( $M_s = 1.50$  and  $0.02$ , respectively) and (b) the perpetrator's and third-party groups ( $M_s = 1.50$  and  $-0.01$ , respectively). In both cases, children in the perpetrator's group reported more pride than their counterparts in the other groups. In the cooperative condition, this effect was driven by a difference between (a) the perpetrator's and target's groups ( $M_s = 4.53$  and  $0.19$ , respectively), and (b) the perpetrator's and third-party groups ( $M_s = 4.53$  and  $-0.32$ , respectively). In both

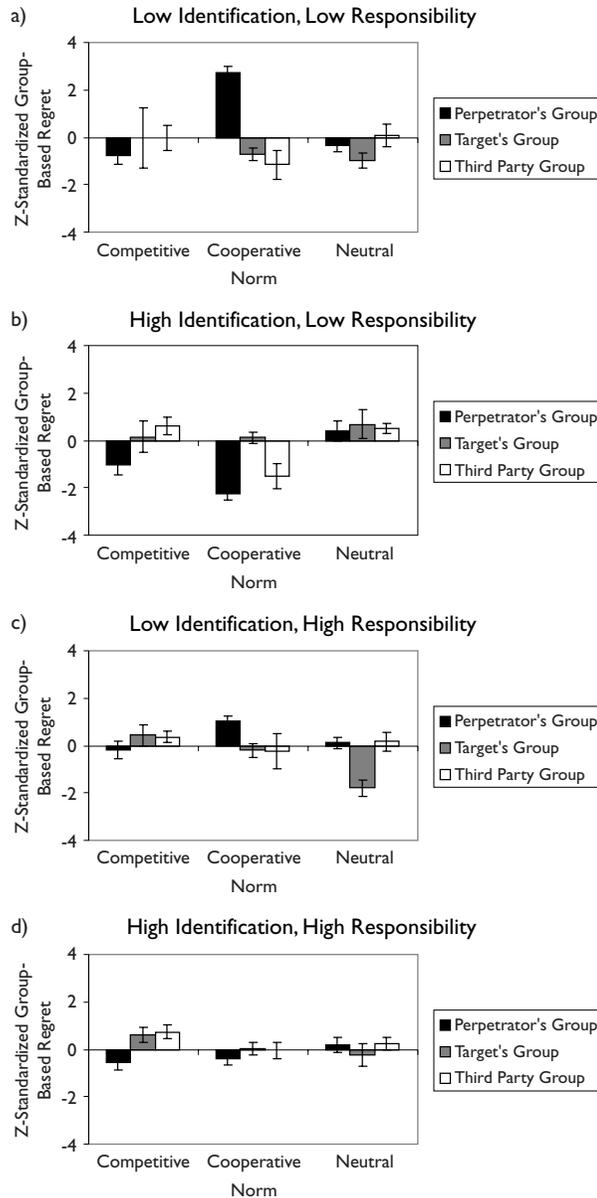


**Figure 1.** Simple effects of group membership at each level of norm for group-based pride. Bars represent estimated means.

cases, children in the perpetrator's group reported more pride than their counterparts in the other groups.

**Regret**

There were several significant lower order effects that were qualified by a four-way interaction between group membership, normative context, identification, and responsibility,  $F(4, 85) = 3.40, p = .013, \eta_p^2 = .138$ . This interaction is illustrated



**Figure 2.** Simple effects of group membership at each level of norm for group-based regret. Bars represent estimated means.

in Figure 2. Further analysis showed that the three-way interaction between group membership, normative context, and identification was significant when levels of perpetrator's responsibility were low (see panels a and b of Figure 2),  $F(4, 85) = 4.02$ ,  $p = .005$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .159$ , but was not when the perceived responsibility of the perpetrator was high,  $F < 1$ . In turn, the two-way interaction between group membership and norm, when the perceived responsibility of the perpetrator was low, was significant at low levels of identification,  $F(4, 85) = 2.50$ ,  $p = .048$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .105$  (panel a of Figure 2),

and when identification was high,  $F(4, 85) = 4.03$ ,  $p = .005$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .159$  (panel b of Figure 2).

The results of simple effects analyses of the regret data show that when identification was low and responsibility was low (panel a of Figure 2), there was a main effect of group membership in the cooperative condition,  $F(2, 85) = 4.62$ ,  $p = .012$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .098$ . This was driven by significant differences between (a) the perpetrator's and target's groups ( $M_s = 2.72$  and  $-0.71$ , respectively), and (b) the perpetrator's and third-party groups ( $M_s = 2.72$  and  $-1.16$ , respectively). In both cases, children in the perpetrator's group reported more regret than their counterparts in the other groups.

When identification was high and responsibility was low (panel b of Figure 2), there was a main effect of group membership in the cooperative condition,  $F(2, 85) = 7.89$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .157$ . These effects were driven by significant differences between (a) the perpetrator's and target's groups ( $M_s = -2.26$  and  $0.12$ , respectively), and (b) the target's and third-party groups ( $M_s = 0.12$  and  $-1.52$ , respectively). Children in the perpetrator's group and the third-party group reported less regret than children in the target's group.

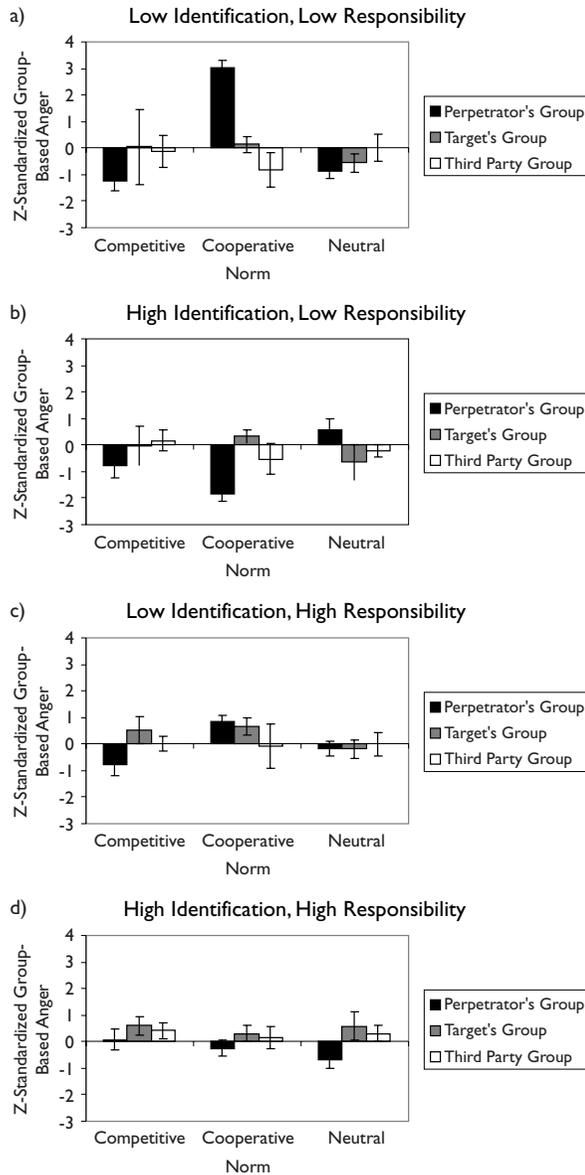
### Anger

There were two significant effects: a two-way interaction between normative context and identification,  $F(2, 86) = 3.38$ ,  $p = .039$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .073$ , qualified by a four-way interaction between group membership, normative context, identification, and responsibility,  $F(4, 86) = 4.94$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .187$ . The latter interaction is illustrated in Figure 3. Further analysis showed that the three-way interaction between group membership, normative context and identification was significant when levels of perpetrator's responsibility were low (see panels a and b of Figure 3),  $F(4, 86) = 3.40$ ,  $p = .013$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .136$ . In turn, the two-way interaction between group membership and norm was significant when the perceived responsibility of the perpetrator was low and when identification was low,  $F(4, 86) = 2.77$ ,  $p = .032$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .114$  (panel a of Figure 3), and when identification was high,  $F(4, 86) = 4.56$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .175$  (panel b of Figure 3).

The three-way interaction was also significant when perceived responsibility was high,  $F(4, 86) = 3.20$ ,  $p = .017$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .130$ . In turn, the two-way interaction between group membership and norm was not significant when identification was low,  $F(4, 86) = 1.48$  (see panel c of Figure 3), but was significant at high levels of identification when the perceived responsibility of the perpetrator was high (see panel d of Figure 3),  $F(4, 86) = 3.16$ ,  $p = .018$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .128$ .

Simple effects analyses of the anger data showed that when both identification and responsibility were low (panel a of Figure 3), there was a main effect of group membership in the cooperative condition,  $F(2, 86) = 4.39$ ,  $p = .015$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .093$ . This effect was driven by differences between (a) the perpetrator's and third party groups ( $M_s = 3.02$  and  $0.82$ , respectively) and (b) the perpetrator's and target's groups ( $M_s = 3.02$  and  $0.13$ , respectively), and (c) the target and third-party groups ( $M_s = 0.13$  and  $0.82$ , respectively). So, children in the perpetrator's group reported more anger than children in the target's and third-party groups; and children in the third-party group reported more anger than children in the target's group.

When identification was high and responsibility was low (panel b of Figure 3), there was an effect of group membership in the cooperative condition,  $F(2, 86) = 4.03$ ,  $p = .021$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .086$ . This was driven by a significant difference between the perpetrator's



**Figure 3.** Simple effects of group membership at each level of norm for group-based anger. Bars represent estimated means.

and target's groups ( $M_s = 1.82$  and  $0.33$ , respectively). Children in the perpetrator's group reported more anger than children in the target's group.

When both identification and responsibility were high (see panel d of Figure 3) there was a simple effect of group membership in the neutral condition,  $F(2, 86) = 3.69$ ,  $p = .029$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .079$ . This was due to differences between (a) the perpetrator's and target's groups ( $M_s = -0.66$  and  $0.58$ , respectively), and (b) the perpetrator's and third-party groups ( $M_s = -0.66$  and  $0.30$ , respectively). Children in the perpetrator's group reported less anger than their counterparts in the other two groups.

### **Relations between group-based emotions, group membership, and action tendencies**

To determine whether each emotion was the best predictor of its associated action tendency, linear regression analyses were performed in which each action tendency was regressed simultaneously on the group-based emotions.

#### *Telling the perpetrator you liked what he or she did*

This model was significant,  $F(3, 111) = 3.17, p = .027, R^2_{\text{adj}} = .054$ . There was a positive, near-significant effect of pride in the behaviour,  $\beta = 0.18, p = .073$ , and no other significant effects.

#### *Saying sorry to the target*

This model was significant,  $F(3, 112) = 23.47, p < .001, R^2_{\text{adj}} = .037$ . There was a positive effect of regret,  $\beta = 0.26, p = .001$ . There was also a positive association between anger and this action tendency,  $\beta = 0.36, p < .001$ , and a negative association with pride,  $\beta = -0.23, p = .006$ .

#### *Telling an adult about what has happened*

Although the overall model was not significant,  $F(3, 114) = 1.80, p = .152, R^2_{\text{adj}} = .020$ , there was a positive, near-significant effect of anger,  $\beta = 0.17, p = .080$ , and no other effects.

## **Discussion**

The results show that the group to which children belonged and the normative context to which they had been exposed combined to influence their responses to the bullying scenario. Consistent with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and group-based emotion theory (Smith, 1993), both the extent to which children identified with their group and their perceptions of the extent to which the perpetrator was responsible for what happened moderated their emotional reaction to the bullying incident. In turn, their pride, regret, and anger predicted action tendencies that are consistent with what is reported in the emotion literature (e.g., Leach, Iyer, & Pedersen, 2006; Livingstone, Spears, Manstead, & Bruder, 2009; Tracy & Robins, 2004).

The most novel aspect of the present findings concerns the influence of normative context. Among children who saw the perpetrator as having low responsibility for what happened, those assigned to the perpetrator's group in the competitive normative context condition reported more group-based pride than did their counterparts exposed to cooperative or neutral norms. Furthermore, target group members reported relatively low levels of group-based pride when exposed to the competitive or cooperative norms. This pattern of findings was mirrored for group-based regret.

There were striking differences in reported levels of anger between children in the perpetrator's group who had been exposed to the competitive as opposed to the cooperative norm. Those in the competitive condition felt less anger than those in the cooperative condition, particularly when they did not identify strongly with their group. Target group members who had been exposed to the competitive norm reported higher levels of group-based anger than those in the cooperative norm condition, when responsibility was seen to be high. In the neutral condition, it was only under conditions

of high identification and high responsibility that target group members expressed more anger than those in other normative context conditions: when there was no norm to guide behaviour, high in-group identification led to higher anger. Among members of the target group, the greatest amount of anger – the emotion most likely to evoke action to stop the bullying – thus resulted from the combination of a cooperative norm and high identification with the target group.

### ***Practical implications: interventions at the peer group and school levels***

We found that children reported different emotions in relation to bullying incidents as a function of the peer groups to which they belonged, and that these emotions led them towards certain actions. In particular, children who identified with a target's group were more likely to experience anger about bullying incidents when their identification with the target's group was high. In turn, anger was linked to a propensity to tell an adult about the bullying.

We also found that the normative context in which a bullying incident occurred affected reported group-based emotions. Viewing the incident in the context of a competitive norm can encourage emotions and action tendencies that endorse bullying; such reactions are not apparent in the absence of a competitive norm, or in the presence of a cooperative one. The attenuating effect of a cooperative norm might occur because it strengthens what most children presumably know about bullying (i.e., that it is unacceptable) and thereby helps to undermine the influence of any assumption that their own peers are more accepting of bullying (see Sandstrom & Bartini, 2010). Anti-bullying interventions might usefully promote a cooperative school norm, through mottos, classroom tasks, or games that encourage children to work together, rather than compete against each other. This is one way in which schools could reduce perceptions of difference between individual and group norms, and encourage children to take a collective stand against bullying.

### ***Limitations and future research***

Research on the role of norms in bullying has demonstrated that children make different judgements depending on whether the behaviour is consistent with a group norm (Ojala & Nesdale, 2004) and that they are likely to reject a bullying child if there is an anti-bullying norm (Sentse *et al.*, 2007). However, little research attention has been paid to the broader normative context of bullying behaviour. The present findings are consistent with Rivers and Soutter's (1996) work showing that invoking a cooperative norm leads children to respond to bullying incidents in ways that reflect greater empathy for the target.

A limitation of the current research is that it does not directly examine the processes through which competitive and cooperative norms influence bullying and children's responses to bullying. Other potential limitations are that we studied bullying in an experimental context rather than a naturalistic classroom setting, and that children's emotions were assessed using single items rather than multi-item scales (although it is worth noting that single-item measures provide a more conservative test of our hypotheses). These limitations could be addressed in further research. Although no gender or age effects were found here, further research could consider gender and age effects on normative behaviour in relation to bullying (see, e.g., Monks & Smith, 2006; Wolke, Woods, & Samara, 2009).

The present study extends previous research by providing experimental evidence of the influence of normative context, specifically through the finding that when children are members of a bullying group and are exposed to a competitive norm, they are more likely to report emotions that enhance a positive view of the bullying group than their counterparts who are exposed to cooperative or neutral norms.

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## Appendix

### Female scenario

Copies of scenarios from other conditions are available from the first author on request.

Volta Primary School is a school in a small town in your Italian province. It is quite a large school, with two classes in each year. Today the teacher is a bit late because of the traffic. In one Year 6 class, the students are waiting: some of them are reading, others

are playing with electronic games or are using their mobile phones. Claudine, one of the girls who sits in the first row, is listening to music.

Victoria wants to draw and she is preparing to use two tables pushed together, a lot of crayons, pencils, stickers, and drawing paper. The drawing materials belong to the school, but all the students can use them, as long as they leave them in the same place for the next person. She wants to prepare a piece for the drawing competition that will be happening next week, in which all the Year 6 students' work will be judged. The prize is a new digital camera.

Just as Victoria is starting Bruna arrives with her friends and demands to use the same drawing materials. They want to prepare their work for the competition, too, and would like to do it now. Bruna knows Victoria got there first but the competition is very important and everyone wants to do their best.

Victoria doesn't allow Bruna and her friends to use the drawing materials so Bruna pushes her and sweeps all the crayons and paper she was using onto the floor. Then Bruna's friends start to laugh at Victoria's drawing skills. Victoria looks hurt and upset but the teacher arrives and all the students go to their seats.