FROM APATHY TO VIGILANCE: MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS' REACTIONS TO THE 2017 UNITE THE RIGHT RALLY

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Center for Race and Public Education in the South

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• Collaborators & Research Team
  • Doctoral students (& co-authors): Kimalee Dickerson, Haley Johnson, Lauren Mims, Andrea Negrete, Miray Seward
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  • Undergrads: Laura Albert, Rafael Olivos, Jenna Koen, Timmy Vadasz

• Middle School Partners: Staff and Students

• Center for Race and Public Education in the South
UNITE THE RIGHT RALLY AS BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE
BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

- Acts of violence and intimidation
- Directed toward stigmatized and marginalized groups
- A mechanism of power
  - Sustains privilege of dominant group
  - Reaffirms social hierarchies

Perry, 2001; Perry & Alvi, 2011
VICARIOUS OR “IN TERROREM” EFFECTS OF BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

• Intended impact beyond immediate victims, i.e., “message crimes”
  • Results in real and/or symbolic threat

• Vicarious traumatization is possible for:
  • Members of the targeted/stigmatized group \(\rightarrow\) fear of being targeted next
  • Members of other groups \(\rightarrow\) dissonance when fundamental ideals are challenged

• Mechanisms of vicarious impact
  • Indirect (e.g., personal connections)
  • Media exposure

Bell & Perry, 2015; Noelle, 2002; Paterson, et al., 2018 Perry & Alvi, 2012
IN TERROREM EFFECTS

- Shock
- Anger
- Fear
- Inferiority
- Normativity
- Victim-Blaming
- Avoidance
- Mobilization

Bell & Perry, 2015; Noelle, 2002; Paterson, et al., 2018 Perry & Alvi, 2012
IN TERROREM EFFECTS

Is there evidence of “in terrorem” effects of the Unite the Right rally on young adolescents?
UNITE THE RIGHT RALLY AS A “MEDIA EVENT”
UNITE THE RIGHT RALLY AS A MEDIA EVENT

• News Media/Social Media as source of knowledge about bias-motivated violence (and other events)
• What major news stories do you remember from middle school?
• Were you in middle school in September, 2001?
HOW YOUNG PEOPLE (AGES 10-18) ENGAGE WITH THE NEWS

**News is still a human endeavor for kids...**

When asked where they got their news “yesterday”:

- Family, teachers, and/or friends: 63%
- Online media (social-networking sites and/or websites or mobile apps): 49%
- Traditional media (television, print newspapers, and radio): 46%

**More children trust news from family than from any other source.**

Percent of kids who trust the information received from each source “a lot”:

- Family: 66%
- Teachers and other adults: 48%
- News organizations: 25%
- Friends: 17%
HOW YOUNG PEOPLE (AGES 10-18) ENGAGE WITH THE NEWS
News negatively affects children’s moods. 63% say the news makes them feel afraid, angry, and/or sad or depressed.

Tweens are more likely to say that the news makes them feel afraid. Tweens: 45%, Teens: 31%.

70% say it makes them feel smart and knowledgeable.

TABLE 5. Children Who Feel the Following When Watching, Reading, or Hearing About the News, by Gender

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<tr>
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<th>Male (n=441)</th>
<th>Female (n=412)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Smart or knowledgeable</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>72%</td>
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<td>Sad or depressed</td>
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<td>Afraid</td>
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FIGURE 17. Tweens and Teens Who Feel the Following When Watching, Reading, or Hearing About the News

BASE: Total tweens (n=261); total teens (n=592)

- Smart or knowledgeable: Tweens 72%, Teens 69%
- Angry: Tweens 44%, Teens 44%
- Sad or depressed: Tweens 46%, Teens 42%
- Afraid: Tweens 45%, Teens 31%
UNITE THE RIGHT RALLY AS A MEDIA EVENT

• What factors shape awareness and impact of major news events?
DIFFERENTIAL SUSCEPTIBILITY VARIABLES

DEVELOPMENTAL
Normative cognitive and psychosocial abilities of young adolescents

DISPOSITIONAL
Race/Racial Identity
Gender
Temperament/Personality
Values, Attitudes, Beliefs

SOCIAL
Family
Peers
School
Community Context

RESPONSE STATES
Cognitive
Emotional
Excitative

MEDIA EFFECTS

Differential Susceptibility to Media Effects Model (DSMM)
(Valkenburg & Peter, 2013)
DEVELOPMENTAL & DISPOSITIONAL FACTORS: COGNITIVE

• Capacity to reason about & understand abstract ideas
• Reliance on personal experience to make sense of the world
• LOTS of variability across youth
DEVELOPMENTAL & DISPOSITIONAL FACTORS: PSYCHOSOCIAL

• Self/Identity exploration
• Ethnic-racial identity: group connection/pride, exploration
• Students of color: more aware of stereotypes
• Racial socialization in families: more common in families of color
SOCIAL FACTORS

- **Social Susceptibility** in the DSMM: “social-context factors that can influence an individual’s selective use of and responsiveness to media” (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013)
  - Geographic context
  - Family context
  - Peer context
  - School context
Q1) Is there evidence of “in terrorem” effects of the Unite the Right rally on young adolescents?

Q2) What role do dispositional and social factors play in the impact on young adolescents?
METHODS
Data collected as part of a larger, mixed-methods study of diversity in middle school students’ friendships.

Two middle schools located in local region where “Unite the Right” took place.

Full sample: 210 students
Current sample: 68 Students
7th Grade (ages 12-13)
56% Girls
DATA COLLECTION

• Individual interviews done between December 2017 and February 2018 (3rd individual or group interview for most students)

• One big news story from this summer was the controversy over removing confederate statues from downtown Charlottesville. On August 12th there was a big march downtown that brought in people from all over the country.
  • What did you hear about these events?
    • Who did you hear it from?
  • Who have you talked to about these events?
  • How did kids/teachers in your school talk about the events?
  • How did they affect kids/friendships?
  • How did they affect you?
Inductive, iterative, collaborative process of analytic memo-writing
Constant comparison, consensus-building, & peer-debriefing to establish
dependability & consistency

(Bhattacharya, 2017; Hill, et al., 2005)
RESULTS
Included in results:
61 Students
(7 students not categorized)
54% Girls
PROFILES

- Unconcerned
- Observant but Unemotional
- Dismissive
- Sympathetic & Disillusioned
- Stressed, Short-Term
- Alarmed & Vigilant
UNCONCERNED (16 STUDENTS)

- Cognitive and emotional distance from the events
- Brief responses, minimal to no emotional language
- Stated they were not personally impacted
“Oh, it didn’t affect me at all” (Dashawn, Black)

“Didn’t really do anything...I just thought it was a little interesting but –not really.” (Sue, Asian)

“Um. I don’t know, it was just something that was like there. That like, like, was important but like didn’t directly affect me” (Eric, Asian/Multiracial)

“Mmm, I mean, not really” (Katherine, White)
## Dispositional Factors
- 63% students of color
- 56% female

## Social Factors
- Some discussion w/ family (and peers); did not elaborate

## In Terrorem Effects
- Not clearly evident
OBSERVANT BUT UNEMOTIONAL, A.K.A. “REPORTERS” (14 STUDENTS)

- Detached, matter-of-fact recounting of events
- Detail-oriented accounts; not shy about sharing
- Observed others’ emotions; no personal impact
Um, what did I hear about these events, uh, well, I know that um, I think the city council, or whoever is in charge is intending to move or take down the Robert E. Lee statue. Um, I know that lots of people are unhappy with that and I know that there are lots of people who that’s, that’s what they wanted. (Daisy, White)

It was unfortunate. In my opinion, it’s just unfortunate what happened. Again, I think it should have been handled by historians and not people who are going to shoot off guns, tear gas bombs, and literally run people over and kill them. (Oliver, White)

Ummm. I guess it was just like on the news for a couple days. I guess I didn't like have too much emotions about it, but I definitely had some like thought about it like thinking -- I guess trying to find my opinion on it. And, why would people be doing this. Just the general understanding of why this was happening. (Liam, White)

I don't think it really affects us. I think it more so affects the adults because they [think] more about it than we do. (Chase, White)
OBSERVANT BUT UNEMOTIONAL, A.K.A. “REPORTERS”

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<th>Dispositional Factors</th>
<th>Social Factors</th>
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<tr>
<td>• 86% White</td>
<td>• Discussed with family, peers</td>
<td>• Not clearly evident</td>
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<td>• 57% female</td>
<td>• Some discussed in school</td>
<td>• Detached</td>
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DISMISSIVE (4 STUDENTS)

- Dismissed arguments about removing the statue
- Dismissed the seriousness of the events
- Some embarrassment over the visibility
- Bias-motivated violence not salient; victim-blaming implied
“[I] kinda find it stupid, because, like, that’s not like the actual person, it’s just a statue of them.” (Cheyenne, White)

“it was just a statue, birds poop on it, it’s not gonna do anything.” (Lauren, White)

Um, I kinda started thinking about how like –it –um, like, how people can get so worked up about things that matter but they’re not enough to be violent about it like, like, over race issue. And things that happened in the past. Because this statue was –I, I felt like the statue um –They were talking about like taking it down and I thought it was ridiculous because history’s history. (Lydia, White)

It was mostly colored people that were causing [the fights and stuff] (Lauren, White)

It's just kind of embarrassing to know that your city is now known for this and what happened here. So, I feel like I was embarrassed by it knowing that I, like, live down here and this happened. (Natalie, White)
**DISMISSIVE**

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<td>• 100% White females</td>
<td>• Discussed with family (family opinions), peers</td>
<td>• “Shocked” but dismissive of hate-motivated violence</td>
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<td>• Some discussed in school (debates)</td>
<td>• Some evidence of victim-blaming</td>
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SYMPATHETIC & DISILLUSIONED (16 STUDENTS)

Understanding & care about human life at stake

Sad about the events, but not deep or lingering

Upset about racism; disillusioned

Sympathy with distance (not empathy)
Um. I imagine some of them with different ethnicities, that word means like race, right?... Okay. Ah, but um, like they probably feel like maybe a little hurt or scared about what’s happening. (Shane, White)

Um, one of the big things was that like a couple people died fighting like for what – what they believe – which is kind of sad. (Dean, White)

Uh, I think it just changed the way I looked at the world probably. Like, how I see – like, how sometimes life can treat, like, other races poor – like, poorly and stuff like that. (Anne, White)

I think like it makes some of us uncomfortable, Um. Cause some people of different races or backgrounds may feel like, I guess, a lot of unfairness and, uh, discrimination towards them (Michael, White)
## SYMPATHETIC & DISILLUSIONED

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<td>63% White</td>
<td>Discussed with family, peers</td>
<td>Sad, sympathetic, shocked</td>
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<td>63% Male</td>
<td>Some peer group similarities</td>
<td>Some realized “normativity” of these events</td>
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STRESSED, SHORT-TERM (5 STUDENTS)

- Short-term fear or anger - personalized
- Focused on KKK and violence
- Aware of targeted group membership
- Recognized emotional impact on others
I mean, I was glad it didn’t happen to me. And felt kind of relieved that somebody, like, it stopped when it stopped. But, kinda scared when it started – because . . . I thought that could’ve been me next. (Logan, Black)

“The KKK is] like going after the African-Americans, trying to kill them and stuff.” “The KKK is] trying to make like black slaves trying like, try to take control over them.” (Anthony, Black/Biracial)

“it felt really uncomfortable because my family lived down, like, near where it was happening, and knowing, that like, the race groups were there… Just made me feel kind of uncomfortable. Like, anything could happen” (Destiny, Black/Multiracial)
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<td>• 100% Students of color</td>
<td>• Discussed with family</td>
<td>• Anger, fear, worry</td>
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<td>• 80% male</td>
<td>• Clear peer-group connections (4 boys were friends)</td>
<td>• Most salient at time of events</td>
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<td>• Some realized “normativity” of these events</td>
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ALARMED & VIGILANT (6 STUDENTS)

- Repeated, negative emotions; lingering impact
- Focused on violence, hate groups
- Fear mixed with confusion for some
- Fear & need for self-protection for others
I’ve heard it and we all talk about it. I got really scared. I was like why is everyone doing this? (Evelyn, Latinx)

Well, it made me like, upset about it because, like, all my family members that like, have Facebook and was all popping up on their Facebook, and we were watching it on the news, so I was like upset about it how they were fighting over it. (Melissa, Black)

it was just kinda, maybe I felt like a bit of hatred… But, I was, like, confused and I was annoyed. Once I kinda got, I didn't get past it, still kinda bothers me now, (Terry, Black)
Um, we were talking about how we should protect ourselves because of what's happening around the KKK rallies and stuff, and like, since there was “super-macist” or whatever they're called, like, um, around, it was just like we had to, like, put a guard on, because, like, we're not accepted, like, well – well people just want America just to be white, and stuff, it's just, yeah. (Stephanie, Latinx)

I was really scared. So, my, my mom was like videotaping and stuff – – and I told her, I was like yelling, “Roll up the window,” and stuff because I was scared that I was gonna get hurt… Especially because those people didn’t accept brown people and they were walking right really close to our car… And I was really scared… I started crying. (Laila, Black Multiracial)
We was get, we was going crazy and like we found like, I found one place that I had like nunchucks and stuff in case like anything like of them, like I was so going crazy. I was like getting so mad, like if they come here like I’m taking this toy nerf gun and hitting them with it if they come in. I don’t want them to like be doing that. (Jaylen, Black)

I’m like, if they come here, I’m running, like I’m going to steal one of the bikes and run. I don’t care. (Jaylen, Black)
DISPOSITIONAL & IN TERROREM EFFECTS ACROSS PROFILES
Racial Composition of Profile

All White Students

Mixed

All Students of Color

Dismissive

Sympathetic & Disillusioned

Unconcerned

Alarmed & Vigilant

Observant but Unemotional

Wary, Short-term
Gender Composition of Profile

All/Mostly Boys

- Wary, Short-term
- Unconcerned
- Observant but Unemotional
- Sympathetic & Disillusioned

Mixed

- Unconcerned
- Observant but Unemotional
- Sympathetic & Disillusioned

All/Mostly Girls

- Alarmed & Vigilant
- Dismissive
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<td>Annoyed, Victim-Blaming</td>
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<td>Embarrassed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sad</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sympathetic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shocked</td>
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<tr>
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<td>✔</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Normativity</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Duration of Emotions

None

Limited

Sustained

Unconcerned

Dismissive

Wary, Short-term

Alarmed & Vigilant

Observant but Unemotional

Sympathetic & Disillusioned
DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS
Is there evidence of “in terrorem” effects of the Unite the Right rally on young adolescents?

- Yes: Just over half of students reported emotional impacts
- Most students reported short-term impacts, but a subset were still actively upset
- Range of effects: Shock; sympathy & disillusionment; anger and fear; normativity
What role do dispositional and social factors play in the impact on young adolescents?

• Race was a critical factor related to the type of in terrorem effects
  • Students of color:
    • Focused on the physical, racial violence; fear of safety & need for self-protection were evident
    • Emotional engagement > cognitive engagement
  • White students:
    • Disillusionment about the ongoing existence of racism; sympathy for “others”
    • Some, but few, were dismissive
    • Cognitive engagement > emotional engagement
What role do dispositional and social factors play in the impact on young adolescents?

• Some evidence of gender differences, but not consistent
  • Girls: over-represented in group with sustained emotional engagement (girls of color) and dismissive group (White girls)
  • Boys: over-represented in group with short-term stress (boys of color)
What role do dispositional and social factors play in the impact on young adolescents?

• Family factors
  • Most students learned about events through watching news with family
  • Family members’ opinions and family socialization around racism important to consider

• Peer factors
  • Some evidence of clustering in profiles by friendship group
  • Some looked to peers for comfort

• Other factors: direct/indirect connections, values/attitudes
IMPLICATIONS

• Bias-motivated violence has the potential to affect young adolescents

• Young adolescents’ cognitive capacities allow them to comprehend violent events like “Unite the Right” but they may not have the content knowledge to make sense of the events

• Differential supports for students who feel sympathy and are questioning the normativity of racism vs. supports for students who experience short- or long-term stress

• Families as primary source of information, but schools can also play a supportive role
THANK YOU!

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