

The Impact of On-looking and Including Bystander Behavior on  
Judgments and Emotions Regarding Peer Exclusion

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**Abstract**

We investigated judgments and emotions in contexts of social exclusion that varied as a function of bystander behavior ( $N = 173$ , 12- and 16-year-olds). Adolescents responded to film vignettes depicting a target excluded by a group with no bystanders, on-looking bystanders, or bystanders who included the target. Adolescents were asked to judge the behavior and attribute emotions to the excluding group, the excluded target, and the bystanders. Younger adolescents judged the behavior of the excluding group as more wrong than older adolescents when there were no bystanders present. All adolescents anticipated more happiness and pride in the excluding group when bystanders were present than when there were no bystanders, and they anticipated shame in excluded targets in the presence of on-looking bystanders. Although the behavior of on-looking bystanders was rated as more wrong compared to the behavior of including bystanders, adolescents anticipated mostly positive emotions to both on-looking and including bystanders. Yet, adolescents justified the inclusive behavior more frequently with empathy than the on-looking behavior, and they also anticipated more empathy to including bystanders than to on-looking bystanders, and they anticipated more guilt to on-looking bystanders than including bystanders.

*Keywords:* Social exclusion, emotion attributions, social cognition

## The Impact of On-looking and Including Bystander Behavior on Judgments and Emotions Regarding Peer Exclusion

Extensive research has been conducted on children's and adolescents' judgments and reasoning about social exclusion in different contexts, pertaining to exclusion based on categories such as ethnicity, gender, and race (Killen, Lee-Kim, McGlothlin, & Stangor, 2002). Recently, this social-cognitive research on social exclusion has been integrated with research on children's and adolescents' attributions of emotions following social exclusion (Gasser, Malti, & Buholzer, 2014; see Killen & Malti, 2015). Furthermore, it has been shown that bystanders are usually present in social exclusion encounters that take place in school settings (Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Barhight, Hubbard, & Hyde, 2013; Pozzoli, Gini, & Vieno, 2012). These bystanders may just observe the situation without engaging in action, or they might intervene by including the excluded target in their own activity. Thus, bystanders play an important role in experiences of peer exclusion and inclusion. The present study was the first to examine whether two main types of bystander interventions (on-looking vs. including) influence judgments, reasoning and emotions about peer exclusion in school settings. Further, we studied judgments and emotions about social exclusion in two age groups (i.e., 12-year olds and 16-year olds), because previous research indicates that adolescents acquire an increasingly differentiated understanding of group functioning (Abrams, Rutland, Pelletier, & Ferrell, 2009).

### **Bystander Behavior and Judgments about Social Exclusion**

Social-domain research has examined how children and adolescents weigh moral, social-conventional, and personal concerns in social exclusion situations. For example, Killen et al. (2002) investigated how U.S. children judge and reason about exclusion based on gender, or race. The findings showed that children and adolescents judged it as wrong to exclude someone because of their race or gender for reasons of unfairness. Yet, older participants were also more likely than younger participants to use group functioning reasons

to justify exclusion, especially in complex or ambiguous situations. Thus, children and adolescents become increasingly aware of group norms and coordinate issues concerning peer group functioning with moral concerns when making judgments about social exclusion.

We are not aware of research that has examined judgments and reasoning about exclusion in a bystander context. Yet, there is an increasing interest among researchers to better understand factors associated with on-looker versus intervening bystander reactions in bullying situations (Roos, Salmivalli, & Hodges, 2011; Sainio, Veenstra, Huitsing, & Salmivalli, 2010; Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004). Related research on bullying has shown that on-looker bystander behavior encourages bullying behavior as children perceive it as quiet support or even encouragement for bullying (Salmivalli, 2010). Similar to bullying situations, adolescents might perceive social exclusion as less wrong when on-looker bystanders are present. Likewise, adolescents might use more social-conventional justifications, such as group norms, in the presence of on-looker bystanders. They may expect that on-looker bystanders provide a form of legitimacy of the exclusion. On the other hand, the presence of including bystanders may elicit more empathic justifications because the consequences of the exclusion become altered, and the reaction of the including bystanders reveal that the exclusion was hurtful to the excluded child. Research has shown that a more complex understanding of groups develops throughout adolescence (Horn, 2003). Peer group norms and pressure become more important to children and may serve as a basis for exclusion of others. We therefore expected 16-year-olds to judge it as more legitimate to exclude peers for reasons of peer group functioning and peer group identity (see Malti, Killen, & Gasser, 2012b).

### **Bystander Behavior and Emotions following Social Exclusion**

Another novel aspect of this study was the focus on the emotions children associate with excluders, excluded targets, and bystanders. While children and adolescents may view exclusion as wrong for reasons of unfairness, their emotions may reveal underlying

ambivalences and biases that contribute to patterns of exclusion (Malti & Ongley, 2014). In line with previous research, the present study assessed the content of emotion attributions (Malti et al., 2012b). This was done to capture more basic emotions (e.g., happy versus sad) and more complex emotions (e.g., shame). Related research with young children has revealed the “happy victimizer” effect in which young children attribute positive emotions to victimizers who receive benefits from bullying (e.g., getting the swing when they push someone off) (Arsenio, 2014; Malti & Krettenauer, 2013). This pattern dissipates by 8-9 years of age. We expected that a version of this effect may appear in adolescence, however, with situations in which excluding someone results in strengthening the group identity. Thus, children may say it is wrong to exclude a child from an activity but still attribute positive feelings to the excluders especially when on-looking bystanders – who might be perceived to be supportive of the action - are present. Children may also attribute mixed (i.e., positive and negative) emotions in these contexts, reflecting emotional ambivalence in complex situations that entail competing moral and amoral concerns. Lastly, we also explored developmental differences in emotion attributions. This was based on related previous research that has shown that adolescents increasingly understand the maintenance of stability of the in-group and group norms (Malti et al., 2012b; Rutland, Killen, & Abrams, 2010).

### **The Present Study**

Drawing on integrated approaches in the study of judgments and emotions in contexts of peer exclusion (for an overview, Killen & Malti, 2015), the present study aimed at investigating the role that different types of bystanders have on judgments and emotions following exclusion. Adolescents were (1) asked to judge and reason about the behavior of the excluding group and the bystanders when present. They were (2) asked to rate the anticipated emotions of the excluding group, the bystanders when present, and the excluded target, as well as to justify the anticipated emotions. Video vignettes of actual school-based social exclusion situations were created. There were three conditions for type of bystander

role (i.e., no bystanders, on-looking bystanders, including bystanders) depicted in the film vignettes. Administering experimental video vignettes provided an approach with high ecological validity. Because previous studies have shown age-related differences in judgments and emotion attribution about peer exclusion (Malti et al., 2012b), we studied these questions in two age groups (i.e., 12-year olds and 16-year olds).

### **Hypotheses I: Judgments and Reasoning about Social Exclusion.**

Our first set of hypotheses focused on whether the presence of on-looking versus including bystanders influenced how adolescents judge and reason about social exclusion. We expected that on-looking bystander behavior would be judged as more wrong compared to including bystander behavior for reasons of fairness. In line with previous research that has shown that children predominantly judge social exclusion without bystanders as wrong (Malti, Ongley, Dys, & Colasante, 2012a), we assumed that the behavior of the excluding group without bystanders present might be evaluated from a moral position, such as concerns about the fair treatment of others. In contrast, the presence of on-looking bystanders might elicit children's intentions to preserve group norms. We also hypothesized that adolescents would view the behavior of the excluding group with inclusive bystanders present as less wrong than exclusion with on-looking bystanders present due to the diminished negative outcome experienced by the excluded individual. Moreover, we hypothesized that adolescents would consider the behavior of the including bystanders as an expression of empathy, because active inclusion might be perceived as an open demonstration of concern for the excluded target.

### **Hypotheses II: Emotions following Social Exclusion.**

Our second set of hypotheses was that the emotions attributed in contexts of peer exclusion vary as a function of bystander behavior. We hypothesized that participants would attribute positive emotions to excluders, such as happiness, especially when on-looking bystanders are present. However, we also expected that participants would attribute negative feelings to excluders because of an increasing coordination of cognitive knowledge ("it is

wrong to exclude”) and the associated emotional consequences (“he feels guilty”). It was expected that the participants would anticipate negative emotions (sadness) to the excluded target when no or on-looking bystanders are present, while they would anticipate positive emotions (happiness) when the target is included. We also assumed that in the on-looking bystander context, participants might anticipate more shame to the excluded target compared with the other two conditions. This was based on related research that has shown that shame is affected by public exposure (Hooge, Zeelenberg, & Breugelmans, 2007), and depends on who witnesses a bullying scenario (Roos et al., 2011).

We expected that participants would attribute positive emotions to on-looking bystanders because they would be perceived as supporting the act of the excluding group. However, they might also be aware that it is unfair to exclude, leading to guilt or mixed feelings. Research has shown that adolescents predominantly feel happy when making a moral choice (Malti, Keller, & Buchmann, 2013), therefore adolescents might attribute even more positive emotions to the inclusive bystanders because this behavior alters the consequences of the exclusion.

### **Hypotheses III: Developmental differences in judgments and emotions following exclusion.**

Our third set of hypotheses concerned developmental difference in judgments and emotion attributions about exclusion. These hypotheses were mostly exploratory because of the limited previous research on developmental differences in this area. Based on related research (Horn, 2003), however, it was expected that with age, participants would increasingly understand the importance of group norms and the competing moral and amoral demands of multifaceted situations of social exclusion (Rutland et al., 2010; Malti et al., 2012b). We predicted that younger adolescents would view exclusion as less acceptable for moral reasons and attribute more negative emotions to excluders, for moral reasons, than older adolescents.

## Method

### Participants

The sample included 173 preadolescents and adolescents attending one secondary school (grade 5 – grade 8) and three high schools (grade 9 – grade 12) located in suburban areas of Austria. There were 89 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders ( $M = 12.13$  years,  $SD = 0.86$ ) including 49 girls (55%), and 84 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders ( $M = 15.76$  years,  $SD = 0.60$ ) including 38 girls (45%). Ninety eight percent of the sample was born in Austria.

The socioeconomic background of the sample was primarily middle income as determined by the school district school records. After obtaining permission from the local school authorities and active parental consent, students were invited to participate. There was a 95% participation rate for the students who were eligible to take part in the study. The data were collected through internet-based questionnaires which were completed during one regular school hour in the school's computer lab under the supervision of one or two trained research assistants.

### Study Design

The study used a within-participants design; all participants were presented with three short movie vignettes (approximately 1.5 minutes) which were presented in the following order: (1) social exclusion without bystanders; (2) social exclusion with on-looking bystanders; and (3) social exclusion with including bystanders (see Figure 1). The order of the conditions was fixed based on multiple considerations. It would have been unrealistic to present the same vignette without bystanders after the vignette with bystanders, as children would likely memorize the bystanders. In addition, the first condition administered was “social exclusion without bystanders,” which served as the baseline for comparison with other research on exclusion which has not examined bystander responses. We determined that “social exclusion within on-looking bystanders” should be described before “social exclusion

with including bystanders,” to avoid priming participants with a “positive” response by the bystanders prior to the “negative” one.

### **Social Exclusion Short Movie Vignettes**

Permission from local school authorities, parents, and students were obtained to produce the short films and to use the material for research purposes (see Figures 1a – 1d). The short films depicted a social exclusion situation during recess. The exclusion situation was developed by a multi-disciplinary team together with a small group of students during a social competence program to maximize the external validity. The actors were 7<sup>th</sup> graders, thus they were approximately 13 - 14 years old. They were from a different school than the participants in the study. Two versions of films were produced; one version where a girl was the excluded target, and another version where a boy was the excluded target. The gender of the excluded target was counterbalanced between female and male study participants.

**Condition 1: No Bystander.** Movie I “No Bystander” is described as follows: First, there is a short scene in the school hall. The bell is ringing to signify recess time. Students are coming out of the classes. Then, the scene changes into a classroom setting. There is a mixed gender group consisting of three students who are playing cards. Next, a fourth student appears and is quickly allowed to enter the card playing group. Shortly afterwards another child (either a boy or a girl) politely asks if he or she could join the group playing cards (see Figure 1b). This child however is not allowed to enter the group. One group member states “you are annoying”, another says “you bother us”. The other two group members ignore the child who is asking to join. Finally, the unhappy face of the excluded child is shown and the film ends.

**Condition 2: Onlooking Bystander.** Movie II “On-looking Bystanders” is described as follows: The scenario is identical with Movie I including the unhappy face of the victim when the film ends. However, in addition there are two bystanders (one boy and one girl) who

watch the situation (see Figure 1a and Figure 1c). When the friendly child is rejected by the group, the bystanders point to the child and quickly ignore the situation.

**Condition 3: Inclusive Bystander.** Movie III “Inclusive Bystanders” is described as follows: The scenario is again identical with Movie I including the unhappy face of the victim when the film ends. However, in addition, the identical two bystanders as in Movie II (one boy and one girl) who are watching the situation ask the excluded child to come and join them after he or she was rejected by the group. The excluded child quickly accepts this invitation. At the end, the three children are shown while having a conversation and reading a text together (see Figure 1d).

**Manipulation Check.** After presenting Movie II and III participants were asked: “Two children watched what happened right now. What did these children do?” Ten participants (12 years old, two girls) were excluded from the analyses because they answered incorrectly in the manipulation check. All other participants correctly answered “They watched, but did nothing” (Movie II) and “They helped the excluded child by including her / him into their own activity” (Movie III).

### **Judgments and Justification of Judgments**

After watching each short film, participants were asked to make judgments about the behaviour of the excluding group as well as the bystanders’ behavior (Movie II and III), and to justify their judgments: 1) *Judgment of the Exclusion* (How “okay” was it for the group to not allow the boy/girl to join them?; *Likert*; 1 = very much okay to 6 = not at all okay); 2) *Justifications for the Evaluation of the Exclusion* (“Why?”), 3) *Judgment of the Bystanders Behavior* (“How “okay” was it for the other two kids to behave the way they did?; *Likert*; 1 = very much okay to 6 = not at all okay), 4) *Justifications of the Bystanders Behavior* (“Why?”).

### **Emotion Attributions**

Three items referred to the attribution of emotions and the justifications of the emotion attributions: 1) *Emotion Attribution of the Excluding Group* (“How do most of the children in

the group feel after they did not let the girl / boy join them? *Likert; 1 = very good to 6 = very bad*); 2) *Emotion Attribution of the Excluded Target* (“How does the girl / boy who was not allowed to join the group feel? *Likert; 1 = very good to 6 = very bad*); 3) *Emotion Attribution of the Bystanders* (“How do the two kids feel? *Likert; 1 = very good to 6 = very bad*).

### **Content and Justifications of Emotions Attributed**

Three items covered the content of the emotions attributed. 1) *Content and Justifications of Emotions Attributed to Excluding Group* (“How do most of the kids of the group feel now? You may check one or two emotions”; proud, happy, sad, angry, fearful, guilty, ashamed, empathetic; 0= not crossed, 1 = crossed; Why?); 2) *Content and Justifications of Emotions Attributed to Excluded Target* (“How does the girl / boy who was not allowed to join the group feel? You may check one or two emotions”; proud, happy, sad, angry, fearful, guilty, ashamed; 0= not crossed, 1 = crossed; Why?); 3) *Content and Justifications of Emotions Attributed to Bystanders* (“How do the two kids feel now? You may check one or two emotions”; proud, happy, sad, angry, fearful, guilty, ashamed, empathetic; 0= not checked, 1 = checked; Why?).

### **Coding and Reliability**

The justifications were assessed with open-ended questions in the Social Exclusion Task and later coded using a validated, slightly modified coding system used in previous research (citations withheld for peer review). The coding system comprised 4 categories including: 1) *Moral*, which refers to fairness, equality, rights (e.g., “Everyone should be treated the same”); 2) *Empathy*, which reflects concerns to the feelings of the excluded target (e.g., “Because the excluded girl was sad”); 3) *Group norms*, which refers to group norms or peer influence (e.g., “Because they have already established their group and they don’t want to include somebody else”); 4) *Undifferentiated/Uncodable*, which refers to undifferentiated, or uncodable statements (e.g., “It’s bad”, “I don’t know”).

Participants' answers were coded as 1 to designate usage of a category and 0 if there was no usage of the category. Participants mentioned either one or two justifications. If a participant mentioned two justifications, each justification received a score of 0.5 for proportional weighting of the use of the category (thus proportions reflected the total sample). The proportions of moral, empathy, and group norms were calculated in order to assess how children justified exclusion and bystander behavior.

Two independent coders rated all of the transcripts. Inter-rater reliability was determined, and the inter-rater agreement was very high, ranging from  $\kappa = 0.80$  to 1.00 (Mean  $\kappa = 0.95$ ).

**Coding the Content of Emotion Attributions.** Adolescents could attribute up to two emotions for the excluding group, excluded target, and bystanders. A previous study indicated that adolescents do not typically mention more than two emotions in these contexts (Malti et al., 2012b). Proportional scores were again calculated (participants' answers were coded as 0 = no use of a category; .5 = partial use of a category; and 1.0 = full use of the category; sum scores were created). Neutral emotions were not considered in final analyses because we had no specific hypotheses regarding these emotions. The emotion categories "proud" and "happy" were collapsed into the category labeled "positive feelings". Thus, the following six categories were used for the data analysis: positive emotions, guilt, shame, sadness, anger, fear, and empathy. To capture the complexity of children's emotional experiences, we also created a category labeled "mixed emotions", which comprised cases in which children attributed both positively valenced (i.e., happy/proud) and negatively valenced, morally relevant emotions (i.e., guilt, shame, sadness, and empathy).

## Results

### Judgments About Excluding Group and Bystanders

To test our hypothesis regarding whether judgments of the excluding group and of the bystanders' behavior varied by the bystander condition and age of the participants, a 3

(Bystander) x 2 (Age) repeated measures ANOVA (analyses of variance), with bystander condition as the repeated measure, was performed on the dependent judgment variables (*Judgement of the Excluding Group; Judgment of the Bystander Behaviors*). For some analyses only 2 levels of Bystander were tested (instead of 3). Post-hoc comparisons using Bonferroni-adjusted p-values were used to test for group differences.

**Judgement of the Excluding Group.** As depicted in Table 1, there was a main effect for bystander condition on judgments of the excluding group,  $F(2, 161) = 4.43, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$ , which was qualified by a *bystander x age* interaction,  $F(2, 314) = 3.41, p < .05, \eta^2 = .02$ . As expected, 12-year-olds judged the behavior of the excluding group with no bystander present as less acceptable compared to 16-year-olds ( $p < .01$ ). A comparison of the mean scores for 12-year-olds in the different conditions revealed significant differences,  $F(2, 78) = 5.92, p < .01, \eta^2 = .07$ . Post-hoc t-tests with Bonferroni corrections revealed that 12-year-olds judged exclusion to be more wrong when no bystander was present compared to when including bystanders were present,  $p < .01$ .

**Judgment of the Bystander Behaviors.** There was a main effect for bystander condition,  $F(1, 160) = 2100.00, p < .001, \eta^2 = .93$  (Table 1) indicating that the behavior of on-looking bystanders was rated as more wrong compared to the behavior of including bystanders.

### **Justifications for Judgments About Excluding Group and Bystanders**

To test our hypotheses with regards to the justifications for judgements about the behavior of the excluding group and the bystander behavior being varied by bystander condition and age of the participants, a series of separate 3 (Bystander) x 2 (Age) repeated measures ANOVA (analyses of variance), with bystander condition as the repeated measure, was performed on the dependent justification variables (*Fairness, Empathy, Group norms*).

**Justifications for judgments about the behavior of the excluding group.** We found a main effect for *bystander* condition on empathy justifications,  $F(2, 160) = 8.03, p < .001, \eta^2$

= .09, which was qualified by a *condition x age interaction*,  $F(2, 160) = 3.97, p < .05, \eta^2 = .05$ . Post-hoc analysis with Bonferroni corrections revealed that 12-year-olds were more likely to use empathic arguments to justify their judgments of the behavior of the excluding group in the no bystander condition compared to 16-year-olds ( $p < .05$ ).

**Justifications for judgments about the bystander behavior.** We found a main effect in the *bystander* condition for fairness,  $F(1, 161) = 5.22, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$  and empathetic justifications,  $F(1, 161) = 12.57, p < .01, \eta^2 = .07$ . As shown in Table 1, participants justified the evaluation of bystander behavior as wrong because it was unfair in the on-looking bystander condition compared to the including bystander condition ( $p < .05$ ). In contrast, they used more empathetic arguments in the including bystander condition compared to the on-looking bystander condition ( $p < .001$ ). In addition, we found a main effect for *bystander* condition on group norms justifications to justify their judgments of the bystanders,  $F(1, 160) = 17.02, p < .001, \eta^2 = .10$ , which was qualified by a *condition x age interaction*,  $F(1, 160) = 19.85, p < .05, \eta^2 = .11$ . Post-hoc t-tests with Bonferroni corrections revealed that 16-year-olds were more likely to use group norms to justify their judgments of the behavior of the on-looking bystanders compared to 12-year-olds ( $M_s = 0.85; 0.53, SD_s = 0.35; 0.50, p < .001$ ).

### **Negative Emotions of the Excluding Group, Excluded Target and Bystanders**

To test our hypothesis about the strength of anticipated negative emotions being varied by the bystander condition and age of the participants, a series of 3 (Bystander) x 2 (Age) repeated measures ANOVAs, with bystander condition as the repeated measure, were performed on the dependent variables (*Excluding Group, Excluded Target, and Bystander*). Post-hoc comparisons using Bonferroni-adjusted p-values were used to test for group differences (see Table 2).

We found main effects for the *bystander* condition on emotions of the excluded target,  $F(2, 161) = 1837.62, p < .001, \eta^2 = .92$ , and the bystanders,  $F(1, 162) = 114.03, p < .001, \eta^2$

= .42. Specifically, participants anticipated more negative emotions to excluded targets when no bystanders were present compared to when on-looking bystanders were present, and more positive emotions when including bystanders were present. They also anticipated more negative emotions when on-looking compared to including bystanders were present ( $p < .001$ ).

We also found a main effect of bystander condition on emotions attributed to bystanders. As expected, participants attributed more positive emotions to including bystanders ( $M = 1.53$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ) than to on-looking bystanders ( $M = 2.49$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ),  $F(1, 162) = 114.03$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .42$ . It should be noted, however, that the mean scores for both conditions were in the positive range on the 1-6 Likert scale.

### **Justifications for Anticipated Strength of Negative Emotions**

To test if the justifications for the strength of emotions attributed to the excluding group and bystanders varied by bystander condition and age of the participants, a series of 3 (Bystander) x 2 (Age) repeated measures ANOVAs, with the bystander condition as the repeated measure, were performed on the three dependent justification variables (*Fairness*, *Empathy*, *Group norms*).

**Excluding Group.** There was a main effect for the *bystander* condition for fairness justifications,  $F(2, 159) = 3.83$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .02$ , indicating that they were more frequently used in the no-bystander compared to the on-looking bystander condition ( $p < .01$ ). We also found a main effect for bystander condition on group norm justifications,  $F(2, 159) = 9.85$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .06$ , indicating that group norm arguments (e.g., that they have already established their group) were more frequently used in the two bystander conditions compared to the no bystander condition ( $ps < .01$ ). In addition, a main effect of *age*,  $F(1, 157) = 10.14$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .06$ , indicated that 16-year-olds ( $M = 0.71$ ,  $SD = 0.04$ ) used group norm arguments more often than 12-year-olds ( $M = 0.53$ ,  $SD = 0.04$ ).

**Bystander.** We found main effects for the *bystander* condition in all dependent variables. Fairness,  $F(1, 162) = 449.85$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .74$ , and empathic justifications,  $F(1,$

162) = 6.34,  $p = .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .04$ , were used more frequently in the situation with including bystanders compared to the situation where on-looking bystanders were present. The main effect for empathy justifications was qualified by a *condition x age* interaction,  $F(1, 162) = 5.08$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .03$ , indicating that 16-year-olds used less empathy justifications in the on-looking bystander condition than 12-year-olds ( $p < .05$ ). The main effect for the bystander condition on group norm justifications,  $F(1, 160) = 19.85$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .11$ , was qualified by a significant *condition x age* interaction,  $F(1, 162) = 22.99$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .11$ , indicating that 16-year-olds used more group norm arguments in the on-looking bystander condition than in the including condition ( $p < .001$ ).

### **Content of Emotions to Excluding Group, Excluded Target, and Bystander**

To test if the content of emotions varied by the bystander condition and age, separate 3 (Bystander) x 2 (Age) repeated measures ANOVAs, with the bystander condition as the repeated measure, were performed on the dependent content of the emotion variables. Post-hoc comparisons using Bonferroni-adjusted p-values were used to test for group differences.

**Excluding group.** As shown in Table 3, a main effect of the bystander condition on positive emotions,  $F(1, 162) = 15.37$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .11$ , revealed that participants attributed more positive emotions regarding the excluding group in the on-looking and including bystander conditions compared to the no bystander condition ( $p < .01$  and  $p < .001$ ). There was also a main effect of condition on anger,  $F(1, 160) = 4.86$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .06$ ; more anger was attributed in the no bystander condition compared to the two bystander conditions ( $p < .01$ ). However, this effect was qualified by a *bystander x age* interaction,  $F(1, 160) = 4.80$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .06$ , indicating that this effect occurred for the 16-year-olds only (no bystander:  $M = 0.24$ ,  $SD = 0.43$ ; on-looking bystander:  $M = 0.13$ ,  $SD = 0.34$ , including bystander:  $M = 0.09$ ,  $SD = 0.28$ ; 12-year-olds, no bystander:  $M = 0.09$ ,  $SD = 0.29$ , on-looking bystander:  $M = 0.07$ ,  $SD = 0.26$ , including bystander  $M = 0.13$ ,  $SD = 0.34$ ;  $p < .01$ ).

**Excluded target.** Regarding content of emotions attributed to the excluded target, we found main effects for the bystander condition on the anticipation of positive emotions,  $F(1, 161) = 380.66, p < .001, \eta^2 = .83$ : Positive emotions were more frequently reported in the including bystander condition compared to the other two conditions ( $ps < .001$ ; Table 3).

The main effect for the bystander condition on anger,  $F(1, 161) = 21.97, p < .001, \eta^2 = .22$ , and on sadness,  $F(1, 161) = 473.83, p < .001, \eta^2 = .86$ , showed that these emotions were more frequent in the no bystander and on-looking bystander condition compared to the including bystander condition ( $ps < .001$ ). A main effect for bystander condition on shame,  $F(1, 161) = 32.82, p < .001, \eta^2 = .29$ , revealed that this emotion was more frequent in the on-looking bystander condition compared to the other two conditions ( $ps < .001$ ). Lastly, we found a main effect for the bystander condition on fear,  $F(1, 161) = 9.67, p < .001, \eta^2 = .11$ ; fear was less frequent in the including compared to the other two conditions ( $ps < .001$ ).

**Bystander.** A main effect for the bystander condition on empathy,  $F(1, 162) = 61.95, p < .001, \eta^2 = .28$ , indicated that empathy was more frequently anticipated for including compared to on-looking bystanders. In contrast, guilt was more frequently anticipated for on-looking than including bystanders,  $F(1, 162) = 36.75, p < .001, \eta^2 = .19$ . A main effect for the bystander condition on mixed emotions,  $F(1, 162) = 11.81, p < .01, \eta^2 = .07$ ; was qualified by a *bystander x age* interaction, indicating that 16-year-olds anticipated more mixed emotions in the including bystander condition compared to the on-looking bystander condition ( $p < .01$ ).

## Discussion

This study examined how children and adolescents evaluated peer exclusion in the presence of three different bystander conditions: no bystander, on-looking bystanders, and inclusive bystanders. Specifically, children's and adolescents' judgments, evaluations, reasoning, and attributions of emotions were measured for excluders, excluded targets, and bystanders. Investigating how different bystander behaviors affect children's and adolescents'

perceptions of social exclusion is important in understanding how children coordinate judgements and emotion attributions about the excluding group, the excluded target, and the bystander behaviors to capture the complexity of social exclusion situations.

Our novel findings were that the bystander behavior affected how children judged and reasoned about the excluding group. Specifically, 12-year-olds were more likely to evaluate the behavior of the excluding group to be wrong when there was no bystander present compared to 16-year-olds. In addition, 12-year-olds judged the behavior as more wrong when no bystander was present compared to when including bystanders were present. This was interesting because this indicated that the 12-year-olds tempered their negative view of excluding groups when the consequences were altered. Interpreting the behavior of the excluding group as less wrong when including bystanders are present is relevant for how the victim will feel but does not change the wrongfulness of the act of exclusion by the group. Yet, 12-year-olds appeared to allow the presence of including bystanders to change their evaluation of the behavior of the excluding group. This finding may relate to age-related changes in cognitive development from late childhood to mid adolescence, as adolescents increasingly understand that altering the consequences of exclusion does not change the wrongfulness of the act of exclusion and change their views on the generalizability and flexibility of these rules. The 12-year-olds may focus on the outcomes of the situation, which is why they consider the presence of including bystanders when evaluating social exclusion (Killen, & Rutland, 2011). The findings also revealed that the participants understood the potentially negative consequences of the bystander behavior, and judged the behavior of the on-looking bystanders to be less acceptable, for reasons of fairness, than the behavior of the inclusive bystanders, due to empathy. The latter finding is in line with related previous research which has shown that empathy predicts students' defending behaviour in situations where a peer becomes a victim of aggression (Barchia & Bussey, 2011).

We also measured the strength of negative emotions and content of the emotions anticipated for excluders, excluded targets, and bystanders. These findings provide a window into the emotional complexities associated with adolescents' perceptions of social exclusion (see Wainryb & Recchia, 2012). Overall, adolescents anticipated mostly positive emotions to both the excluding groups and on-looking bystanders, for reasons of group functioning, and they anticipated positive emotions to including bystanders for reasons of fairness and empathy. Adolescents may perceive the affective consequences of excluders and bystanders positively because they understand the positive effects of stable peer groups for one's emotional well-being and mental health (Killen & Malti, 2015; Newman, Lohman, & Newman, 2007), and they may interpret the on-looking bystanders as being supportive of the stability of the peer group. Vice versa, they may be aware of the positive consequences of helping others for the self (Laible, Carlo, & Roesch, 2004).

Regarding content of emotions, one striking finding was that adolescents anticipated more happiness and pride in the excluding group when in the presence of bystanders as opposed to when bystanders were absent. This resonates with the finding that excluded targets are assumed to feel less negative when bystanders are present compared to when they are not. In other words, bystanders seem to alter the anticipated emotional consequences for both the excluding group and the excluded children. Again, this finding points to the impact of group processes on anticipated emotions for excluders. As expected, most adolescents anticipated that the excluded target would feel happy in the including bystander condition compared to the other two conditions. Interestingly, however, adolescents also anticipated more shame to the excluded child in the on-looking bystander condition compared to the other two conditions. Adolescents might have anticipated shame because the bystanders in the on-looking condition point to the child which may have suggested taunting. Alternatively, this may indicate that adolescents do, in part, understand that the presence of on-looking bystanders may exacerbate the negative emotional consequences of the exclusion for the

excluded target. This interpretation is further supported by the fact that anger and sadness were more frequently anticipated in the no bystander and on-looking bystander conditions compared to the including bystander condition. In addition, the anticipation of anger is important from an intervention perspective as anger may increase intergroup tension and conflicts and lead to different behavioral reactions than sadness.

The majority of adolescents anticipated positive emotions to both on-looking and including bystanders. The finding may reflect their understanding of the potentially negative consequences of the inclusion of an out-group member on relationships with in-group peers which is why they may anticipate positive emotions in the on-looking bystander condition. They may anticipate positive emotions to including bystanders because of their understanding that they actively alter the negative effects of exclusion on the excluded target. Interestingly, however, adolescents also anticipated more empathy to including bystanders than on-looking bystanders, and they anticipated more guilt to on-looking bystanders than including bystanders. This finding shows that adolescents may understand the moral motives and consequences underlying including versus on-looking behavior: empathy may serve as motive for the behaviour of including bystanders. In contrast, guilt is anticipated as the consequence of witnessing an unfair act without acting. We also found that 16-year-olds anticipated more mixed feelings in the including bystander condition than 12-year-olds. Adolescents may increasingly understand the feelings of the victim, but also anticipate the potentially negative consequences of the inclusion of an out-group member on relationships with in-group peers. This resonates with recent research by Pozzoli and Gini (2013), which documented that the effect of peer expectations on attitudes toward bullying was stronger in adolescents than in children.

Despite several noteworthy strengths, it is important to note that this study was limited in that live-action exclusion scenarios were used, which might have compromised internal validity. Yet, it contributed to high ecological validity and provided a control across

participants as this ensured that they viewed the same situation. Another potential limitation was that a fixed order was described to participants which does not allow to disentangle order and condition effects. Specifically, the first condition administered was “peer exclusion without bystanders,” which served as the baseline for comparison with other research on exclusion which has not examined bystander responses. We determined that “peer exclusion within on-looking bystanders” should be described before “peer exclusion with including bystanders,” to avoid priming participants with a “positive” response by the bystanders prior to the “negative” one. The concern was that if participants heard the including bystander condition before the on-looking bystanders, they would be inclined to view exclusion with onlookers more negatively as a result of priming based on the introduction of a context in which bystanders were including. Children at this age will default to positive responses which is an interesting phenomenon, but not one that we were studying. We were interested in whether children would view exclusion more negatively when bystanders did or did not intervene to help. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that future research is warranted to test whether a different order would have a different outcome of responses.

Despite these limitations, the findings extended previous research by showing how bystander behavior affects judgments and emotions about exclusion. This knowledge has useful implications for intervention programs, designed to reduce bullying behavior. For example, the finding that including bystanders are considered empathetic with the excluded child indicates that children may anticipate more empathy with excluded targets when they see others helping. Thus, educators might want to promote inclusive classrooms by encouraging children to assign “helper” roles to their peers when they see someone being excluded (see Salmivalli & Poskiparta, 2012). This may not only alter the excluded child’s feelings but also decrease in-group out-group distinctions at the classroom level.

In summary, this research contributed novel information about how the presence of bystanders affects children’s judgments and emotions in multifaceted situations involving

social exclusion. Further research on how group processes impact children's experiences of peer exclusion may help us deepen our understanding when, and why, children consider peer group norms and pressure in their decision-making, and anticipated emotions, of peer exclusion.

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Table 1

*Means (and Standard Deviations) of Judgments and Proportional Scores (and Standard Deviations) of Justifications of Judgements by Age Group*

	No Bystander		On-looking Bystanders		Including Bystanders	
	12-year-olds	16-year-olds	12-year-olds	16-year-olds	12-year-olds	16-year-olds
Judgment						
Excluding Group <sup>1</sup>	5.58 (0.59) <sup>a</sup>	5.10 (1.05) <sup>a</sup>	5.35 (0.81)	5.21 (1.06)	5.08 (1.35)	5.07 (1.36)
Bystander Behavior <sup>1</sup>			5.28 (0.85) <sup>b</sup>	5.23 (0.80) <sup>b</sup>	1.14 (0.35) <sup>b</sup>	1.40 (0.78) <sup>b</sup>
Justification of Judgments of Excluding Group						
Moral-Fairness <sup>2</sup>	0.70 (0.43)	0.74 (0.38)	0.76 (0.42)	0.64 (0.45)	0.72 (0.45)	0.68 (0.44)
Moral-Empathy <sup>2</sup>	0.20 (0.36) <sup>a</sup>	0.11 (0.23) <sup>a</sup>	0.07 (0.23)	0.08 (0.24)	0.03 (0.17)	0.08 (0.24)
Group Norms <sup>2</sup>	0.08 (0.32)	0.14 (0.41)	0.11 (0.39)	0.12 (0.37)	0.05 (0.22)	0.09 (0.31)
Justification of Judgments of Bystander Behaviors						
Moral-Fairness <sup>2</sup>			0.75 (0.43) <sup>b</sup>	0.77 (0.41) <sup>b</sup>	0.66 (0.46) <sup>b</sup>	0.63 (0.46) <sup>b</sup>
Moral-Empathy <sup>2</sup>			0.11 (0.30) <sup>b</sup>	0.08 (0.27) <sup>b</sup>	0.25 (0.42) <sup>b</sup>	0.25 (0.41) <sup>b</sup>
Group Norms <sup>2</sup>			0.03 (0.17)	0.07 (0.26)	0.05 (0.20)	0.10 (0.29)

<sup>1</sup> Possible range: 1-6 (1= very much okay, 6 = not at all okay).

<sup>2</sup> Possible range: 0-1 (0= not mentioned, 1 = mentioned).

<sup>a</sup> Indicate significant differences between 12- and 16-year-olds.

<sup>b</sup> Indicate significant differences across conditions.

Table 2

*Means (and Standard Deviations) of Strength of Emotions and Proportional Scores (and Standard Deviations) of Justifications of Emotions by Age Group and Condition*

	No Bystander		On-looking Bystanders		Including Bystanders	
	12-year-olds	16-year-olds	12-year-olds	16-year-olds	12-year-olds	16-year-olds
Strength of Anticipated Negative Emotion						
Excluding Group <sup>1</sup>	2.78 (1.30)	2.87 (0.98)	2.75 (1.18)	2.70 (1.03)	2.81 (1.20)	2.73 (1.00)
Excluded Target <sup>1</sup>	5.83 (0.53) <sup>a</sup>	5.74 (0.47) <sup>a</sup>	5.63 (0.70) <sup>a</sup>	5.48 (0.69) <sup>a</sup>	1.59 (0.93) <sup>a</sup>	1.67 (0.82) <sup>a</sup>
Bystanders <sup>1</sup>			2.60 (1.12) <sup>a</sup>	2.45 (0.90) <sup>a</sup>	1.42 (0.83) <sup>a</sup>	1.64 (0.64) <sup>a</sup>
Justification of Emotions of Excluding Group						
Moral-Fairness <sup>2</sup>	0.20 (0.39) <sup>a</sup>	0.13 (0.32) <sup>a</sup>	0.10 (0.30) <sup>a</sup>	0.07 (0.22) <sup>a</sup>	0.13 (0.33)	0.10 (0.27)
Moral-Empathy <sup>3</sup>	0.06 (0.22)	0.06 (0.19)	0.06 (0.25)	0.01 (0.08)	0.04 (0.18)	0.03 (0.15)
Group Norms <sup>3</sup>	0.49 (0.50) <sup>a,b</sup>	0.57 (0.47) <sup>a,b</sup>	0.61 (0.49) <sup>a,b</sup>	0.82 (0.36) <sup>a,b</sup>	0.50 (0.51) <sup>a,b</sup>	0.72 (0.43) <sup>a,b</sup>
Justification of Emotions of Bystander						
Moral-Fairness <sup>2</sup>			0.09 (0.29) <sup>a</sup>	0.02 (0.09) <sup>a</sup>	0.82 (0.38) <sup>a</sup>	0.78 (0.38) <sup>a</sup>
Moral-Empathy <sup>2</sup>			0.08 (0.27) <sup>c</sup>	0.01 (0.11) <sup>c</sup>	0.09 (0.29)	0.12 (0.28)
Group Norms <sup>2</sup>			0.53 (0.50) <sup>c</sup>	0.85 (0.35) <sup>c</sup>	0.06 (0.25)	0.04 (0.19)

<sup>1</sup>Possible range: 1-6 (1= very good, 6 = very bad)    <sup>2</sup> Possible range: 0-1 (0 = not mentioned, 1 = mentioned)

<sup>a</sup> Indicate significant differences across conditions.

<sup>b</sup> Indicate significant differences between 12- and 16-year-olds across conditions.

<sup>c</sup> Indicate significant differences between 12- and 16-year-olds.

Table 3

*Proportional Scores (and Standard Deviations) of Types of Emotions Attributed to Excluding Group and Excluded Target*

Emotions Attributed to Excluding Group <sup>1</sup>			
	No Bystander	On-looking Bystanders	Including Bystanders
Positive emotions (Happy/proud)	0.56 (0.43) <sup>a</sup>	0.66 (0.41) <sup>a</sup>	0.70 (0.41) <sup>a</sup>
Anger	0.16 (0.37) <sup>b</sup>	0.10 (0.30) <sup>b</sup>	0.11 (0.31) <sup>b</sup>
Guilt	0.15 (0.30)	0.13 (0.27)	0.08 (0.23)
Shame	0.08 (0.22)	0.06 (0.20)	0.08 (0.20)
Empathy	0.06 (0.19)	0.04 (0.15)	0.04 (0.16)
Mixed emotions (positive and negative)	0.28 (0.45)	0.23 (0.42)	0.21 (0.41)
Emotions Attributed to Excluded Target <sup>2</sup>			
	No Bystander	On-looking Bystanders	Including Bystanders
Positive Emotions (Happy/proud)	0.00 (0.04) <sup>a</sup>	0.03 (0.14) <sup>a</sup>	0.88 (0.29) <sup>a</sup>
Anger	0.10 (0.22) <sup>a</sup>	0.12 (0.22) <sup>a</sup>	0.01 (0.07) <sup>a</sup>
Sadness	0.66 (0.31)	0.52 (0.33)	0.06 (0.21)
Shame	0.12 (0.23) <sup>a</sup>	0.23 (0.32) <sup>a</sup>	0.02 (0.13) <sup>a</sup>
Fear	0.08 (0.19) <sup>a</sup>	0.08 (0.20) <sup>a</sup>	0.03 (0.14) <sup>a</sup>
Emotions Attributed to Bystanders <sup>3</sup>			
	On-looking Bystanders	Including Bystanders	
Positive Emotions (Happy/proud)	0.76 (0.37)	0.72 (0.35)	
Guilt	0.11 (0.27) <sup>a</sup>	0.00 (0.04) <sup>a</sup>	
Empathy	0.03 (0.17) <sup>a</sup>	0.25 (0.32) <sup>a</sup>	
Mixed emotions (positive and negative)	0.17 (0.38) <sup>b</sup>	0.32 (0.47) <sup>b</sup>	

<sup>1</sup> Fearful and sad emotions were dropped because of low occurrence (<3%). <sup>2</sup> Empathetic feelings were not assessed in this context; guilt and mixed feelings were dropped because of low occurrence (<5%). <sup>3</sup> Shame, anger, fear, and sadness were dropped because of low occurrence (<3%).

<sup>a</sup> Indicate significant differences across conditions.

<sup>b</sup> Indicate significant differences between 12- and 16-year-olds across conditions.

Figure Captions.



1a. Excluded child, excluding group, bystanders



1b. Excluded child approaches excluding group



1c. On-looking bystanders



1d. Including bystanders

Figure 1. Screenshot Images from the Movie Vignettes (Boy's Version)