

Altruism Born of Suffering: Positive Development in a 'Post-Accord' Generation

Final Report

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Summary of Project Aims

Through this project we aimed to identify factors relating to the positive development of young people born after the peak of intergroup violence. More specifically, we hoped to identify processes related to Altruism Born of Suffering (ABS), a theory that outlines the relations among risk/harm, responses, and resources that may motivate individuals to help others (Vollhardt, 2009), and positive development among young people in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

Project Activities and Milestones

Our specific activities, time period and reflections on these activities are outlined in the table below.

Task	Time period	Comments
Draft and finalise survey measures	October- December 2015	We refined our measures based on current literature and where necessary adapted this to suit our sample age.
Apply for ethical approval	January-February 2016	Ethical approval was obtained from Queen's University Belfast.
Recruitment of schools	March- April 2016	We matched schools to focus on religious affiliation, socio-economic status and whether they were in an interfaced ¹ or non-interfaced areas. Schools were first sent letters and followed up afterwards.
Online survey set-up and pilot testing	May 2016	We had to refine our measures much more than anticipated as perceptions of harm across our ABS vignettes differed.
Presentation of project idea	May 2016	We presented our research plans at the Northern Ireland British Psychological Society (BPS) Annual Conference. This provided an opportunity to further refine our project before data collection began.
Time 1 data collection	May-June 2016	Data collection was laborious and required a lot of research assistant support, including volunteers. In some schools, the implicit software did not work properly prompting us to revisit this for our Time 2 data collection.
Analysing Time 1 Data	July-August 2016	We conducted some preliminary analysis of our data which was presented at the British Psychological Society (BPS) social section conference. Additional conference submissions have been submitted and have been accepted at the Society for Research on Child Development (SRCD) to be presented as a poster in 2017.

¹ Interface areas are homogenous Catholic/Protestant neighbourhoods are separated by a 'peace wall' or other physical barrier from a homogenous area of the other group. For example, two of the interfaced schools in our sample were separated by a large hedge (Figure 1).

Refining measures and contacting schools	August 2016	Before collecting Time 2 data, we reviewed and evaluated what worked well (or less well) at Time 1. We then submitted an ethics revision and contacted schools to prepare for Time 2 data collection.
RBT Chapter and journal special issues	September 2016	We submitted a chapter for the RBT book reporting some of our findings and an abstract for a journal special issue.
Time 2 Ethics	September 2016	Required to submit Time 2 ethics approval based on the number of changes from Time 2.
Time 2 data collection	September- October 2016	Due to the difficulties in accessing school children outside of school time, we decided to push back our Time 2 data collection from August to September/ October. The remaining schools are being collected by the end of December 2016 (this is supported by additional funding we received after the RBT grant).

Project Details

We recruited a total of 9 schools for our project. This included 1 pilot-test school, and then for the main study: 2 Catholic interfaced, 2 Protestant interfaced, 2 Catholic non-interfaced, 2 Protestant non-interfaced schools and. The final sample comprised 466 youth (aged 14-15; 51% Catholic, 49% Protestant; evenly split by gender). We measured a series of variables including: identity strength, peacebuilding values, empathy, experience of sectarian anti-social behaviours, civic and political participation in society etc. At Time 1, participants were also exposed to a series of facebook vignettes designed to measure Altruism Born of Suffering (Figure 2).

Project Results

We are still finalising Time 2 data collection, so the following findings represent a sample of the types of papers we plan to write moving forward.

First, we investigate the claim that ‘violence begets violence’ by trying to identify underlying processes that link adolescent exposure to sectarian antisocial behavior with participation in such acts in a setting of protracted conflict. Past research has shown that a cohesive family environment, marked by a feeling of togetherness, is related to lower levels of participation in sectarian acts (Taylor et al., 2014). Research in the US has also shown family ethnic socialization to largely be a positive factor for minority youth (Umaña-Taylor, Zeiders, & Updegraff, 2013). However, family ethnic socialization has also been shown to contribute to ethnic prejudice, intergroup bias, and outgroup attitudes (Degner & Dalege, 2013), particularly in settings of entrenched, and sometimes violent, intergroup conflict (Nasie, Diamond, & Bar-Tal, 2015; Reidy et al., 2015). Such intergroup bias has also been related to support for aggression against the outgroup (Fisk, 2002). Therefore, the current study investigates the extent to which family ethnic socialization leading to intergroup bias, mediates the impact of exposure to sectarianism and participation in such acts. Using our survey data, bootstrapped chain mediation analyses were conducted in Mplus, controlling for age and Catholic/Protestant background. Supporting a theory of developmental provocation, in which young people illicit conversations about difficult subjects in the home, experience with sectarian antisocial behavior (Goeke-Morey et al., 2009) was positively ($\beta = .23, p < .001$) related to higher levels of family ethnic socialization (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2013). Higher levels of family ethnic socialization, in turn, were related to more intergroup bias among adolescents ($\beta = .41, p < .001$). Finally, stronger intergroup bias predicted higher levels of participation in sectarian acts towards members of the other community ($\beta = .25, p < .001$). The overall indirect effect was significant ($b = .073, 95\%CI: .042, .105$) and the direct effect of experience with sectarian antisocial behavior on participation in such acts remained significant ($\beta = .44, p < .001$), suggesting partial mediation with the overall model explaining 39% of the outcome. These findings highlight the importance of understanding family

processes affect intergroup attitudes and behaviors in response to risk exposure in the community. Interventions aiming to reduce youth participation in intergroup violence, therefore, may need to consider a family-component to help redirect messages around ethnic socialization. Such translational efforts are necessary as participation in sectarian acts not only have individual implications for young people, but also have wider societal implications by perpetuating the conflict between the Catholic and Protestant communities in Northern Ireland.

Second, we are writing a paper on how intergroup conflict has devastating consequences on society; it affects individuals, groups, communities and wider social and national structures. Understanding how to promote positive outcomes following conflict is therefore of urgent importance, especially for the next generation. The majority of research on youth in conflict has focused on the negative effects for youth; yet, conflict experiences may also lead to constructive outcomes. Embracing a risk and resilience approach and focusing on the post-accord generation in Northern Ireland, this study examined the role of intergroup contact in promoting peacebuilding values and the consequence these have on social and political civic participation. Previous research has shown that intergroup contact can reduce prejudice and promote positive intergroup relations. This study extended those findings to examine more specific peacebuilding attitudes and youth civic engagement. Across groups, we predicted (1) high quality and high frequency contact would be associated with stronger peacebuilding values, (2) peacebuilding values will be associated with increased social and political civic participation, and that (3) peacebuilding values would mediate the link between contact and social and political civic participation.

An exploratory factor analysis and later multigroup comparisons were used to determine the structure of the peacebuilding scale. For both Catholic and Protestant youth, a 5-item peacebuilding values scale was established. Hypotheses were tested using structural equation modelling and bootstrapped mediation in MPlus. The overall model was a good fit to the data. Results found that high quality and high frequency contact were associated with stronger peacebuilding values, and in turn, that peacebuilding values were associated with an increase in both social and political civic participation. Peacebuilding values partially mediated the relations among contact (quality and quantity) and both forms of participation. Only contact quantity was found to be directly related to increased civic participation.

The findings offer support for the peacebuilding potential of conflicted-affected youth. We demonstrate here that youth who are living with the legacy of protracted intergroup contact can embrace peacebuilding values and engage in positive societal behaviours such as civic participation. By recognising the peacebuilding potential of young people, especially in a 'post-accord' generation, the findings may inform interventions following intergroup conflict, providing policymakers with a platform to discuss how to best promote youth social and political civic engagement.

Overall, the data are promising and allow us to focus on both positive and negative outcomes of conflict experiences for youth in Belfast. We will continue to conduct analyses for papers that build on early findings, such as we found that increased empathy is associated with increased helping of ingroup and outgroup members who have experienced harm (as read in our ABS vignettes).

Dissemination and Impact

From our analysis to date, we have presented our findings at two conferences, produced a chapter for the RBT book and submitted an abstract for a special issue on youth and political participation. Importantly, we believe that through our preliminary explorations of the data, that we have a number of exciting avenues to pursue in terms of societal impact. For example, we have established a way to measure peacebuilding values and observed that what peacebuilding means differs for the Protestant and Catholic communities. This has direct implications for the use of flags and other contentious issues in Northern Ireland.

Future Plans

Over the next few months we will continue to analyse our Time 2 data and compare this to what we observed at Time 1. When we have completed this, we will produce a series of outputs. In addition to the academic manuscripts described above, our future plans include a newsletter, shared through a project web site we are developing, for interested parents, principals, and teachers to increase awareness in communities and schools. In the mid-term (Spring 2017 TBC), we will hold a public event at Queen's University, Belfast (QUB), and invite key stakeholders (policy makers, school teachers, the parades commission and local press) to discuss promoting prosocial behaviour amongst young people. In the long term, we intend to apply for an RCUK grant to take the next step in this research.

Financial Report

Budget (Total request= £9,915; Spent £9,912)

RBT funds primarily covered data collection; host institutions covered staff salary and some equipment/travel expenses.

Research assistance (Budgeted £2,040; Spent £2,364): The research assistant (RA) worked a total of 197 hours at £12/hour during the time of this grant period. This included reading background material, training on computer software, attending project meetings, recruiting schools and collecting Time 1 data in schools, prepping Time 2 Ethics and data collection, contacting schools and arranging Time 2 data collection, and the majority of Time 2 data collection prior to the end of this grant period. We also had a cohort of trained volunteers to help with data collection; this included a total of 150 volunteer hours of added value to the project with no financial cost.

Travel (Budgeted £580; Spent £411): This covered the expenses relating to travel costs for RA and volunteers to visit each school, the Co-I to travel to Belfast for data analysis and to present at the Northern Ireland British Psychological Society (NIBPS) conference in March 2016, and the conference fees for the PI, Co-I and RA to attend the NIBPS conference in March 2016. As a cost-saving method, the Co-I also visited Belfast as a guest speaker (paid for by the School of Psychology) and regular communication of the research team was conducted via email and skype throughout the course of the grant.

Equipment (Budgeted £1,995; Spent £2,389): We purchased a Macbook and an Inquisit by Millisecond license to enable set up, data collection and analysis of the implicit attitudes. The Co-I will retain the equipment to conduct analyses on the project data.

Consumables (Budgeted £500; Spent £623): Costs for sending letters to parents, printing, and photocopying.

Participant payment (Budgeted £4,800; Spent £4,125): At Time 1, each school (including the pilot school) received a £100 Amazon voucher (total of 9 schools, including the pilot school), and within every school, each class received a £25 Amazon voucher. At Time 2, each school received another £100 voucher, and youth who participated in both time points received a £10 voucher; we have a remaining 100 participants to compensate that will be covered from the second grant we received that continues through 2017.

Appendices

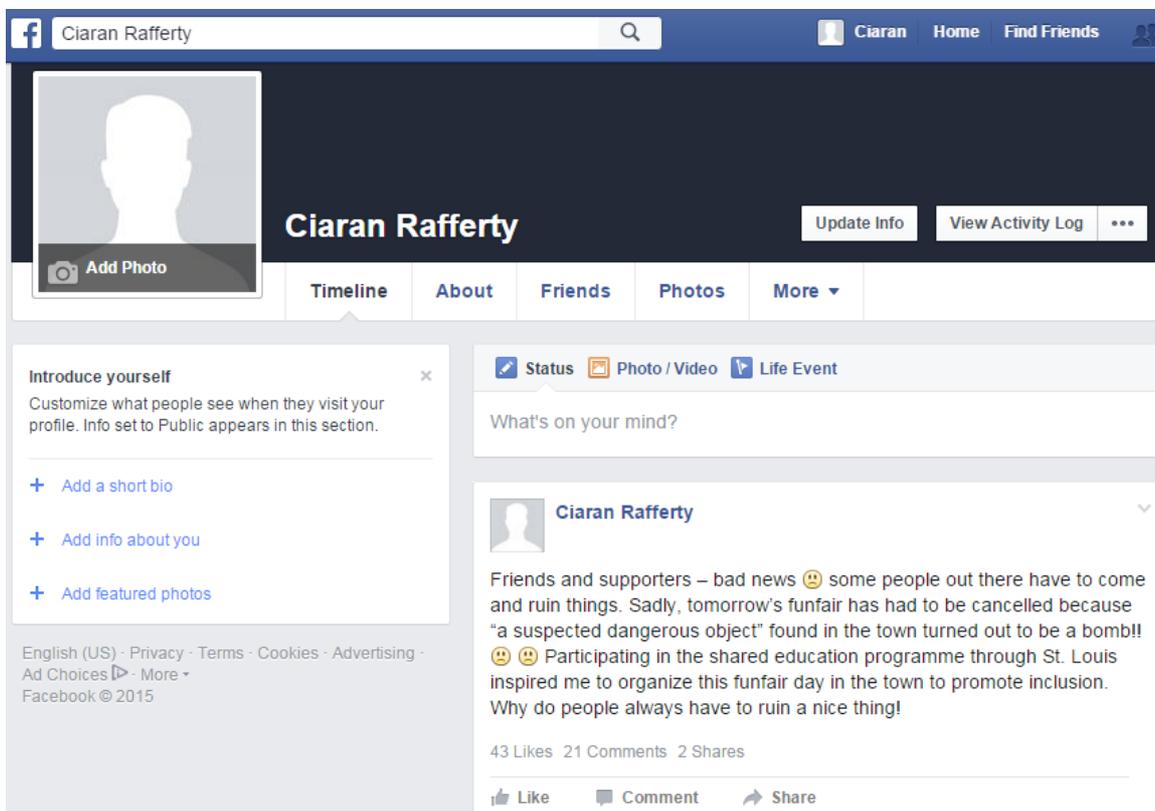
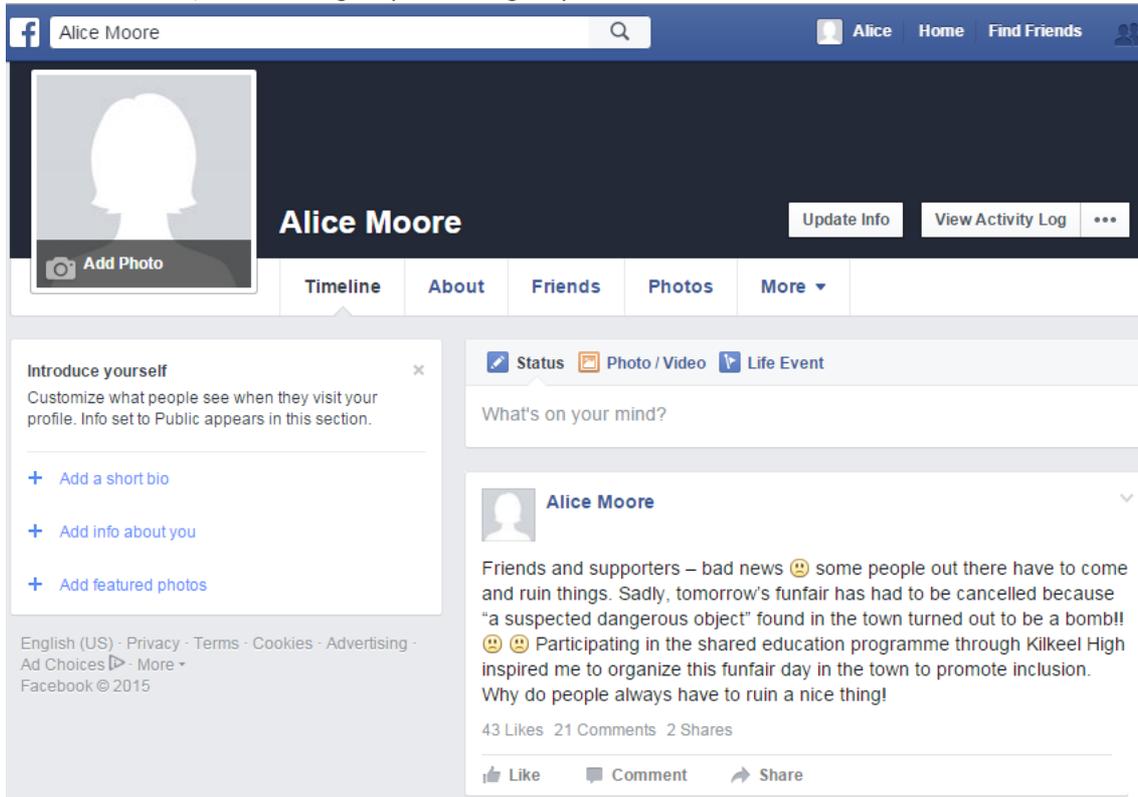
Figure 1

On the left (brown building) and right (green building) are two of the participating schools. This image demonstrates the nature of interfaced schools; Protestant children go to the school on the left and Catholic children go to the school on the right. These are homogenous schools, separated by a physical barrier, and the presence of the 'other' group is quite acute in such settings.



Figure 2

The following are examples of the facebook vignettes we tested, after two rounds of pilot testing, with our full sample of adolescents. These were designed to test empathetic responses and helping intentions when harm was suffered in four ways (individual intentional, collective intentional, individual non-intentional, collective non-intentional) for both ingroup and outgroup same-sex members.



The image is a screenshot of a Facebook page for a community named "East Belfast News Community". The page header includes a profile picture of a white flag on a pole, the name "East Belfast News Community", and buttons for "Create Call to Action", "Like", "Message", and a menu icon. Below the header are navigation tabs for "Timeline", "About", "Photos", "Likes", and "More". The main content area shows a post from "East Belfast News" with a white flag icon. The post text reads: "Flash floods have hit city centre, with Short Strand hit the hardest. Residents there are wading through 1ft of water. As the flooding occurred suddenly, folks there had no chance to secure their belongings, and many personal effects were lost. We don't know when residents can return to their homes and are being sheltered in St. Matthew's Parish Hall." Below the text, it shows "83 Likes 6 Comments 1 Share" and buttons for "Like", "Comment", and "Share". On the left side of the page, there are sections for "ABOUT" and "PHOTOS".