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The Role of Participant Immigrant Background and Gender in Middle School Youth's Responses to Actual and Hypothetical Experiences of Bias-Based Bullying

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ABSTRACT

The present study draws on socio-cultural theories and socio-cognitive theories as guiding frameworks to examine responses to bias-based bullying among 481 middle school youth (49% female; 15% immigrant; 36% minoritized ethnicity). Based on student self-report data, we examined: (1) whether middle-schoolers response strategies' from the perspective of the victim being excluded or bullied varied across three hypothetical bias-based bullying scenarios based on participant's immigrant background and gender and by target victim's ethnic im/migrant background (e.g. Arab, Latinx, Black); and (2) whether youth disclosure of actual bullying experiences (i.e. to whom they disclosed their bullying experience) differed by their immigrant background and gender. Findings revealed that none of the immigrant girls reported that they would hit the excluder from the perspective of the Latina hypothetical victim compared to when the hypothetical victim was Black and Arab. In response to their actual experiences, immigrant girls were least likely to tell anyone (e.g. peer, teacher, or parent) if they were bullied at school. Results highlight the importance of fostering family and school administration awareness of bullying victimization and the creation of culturally sensitive school interventions and policies for reporting and preventing the bullying victimization of immigrant children, particularly for immigrant girls.

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Immigrant youth are targets of bias-based bullying (i.e. bullying based on one's minoritized social identities or group membership) due to negative attitudes toward their immigrant background, language fluency, accent, and religion (see Brenick et al., 2012; Brenick & Halgunseth, 2017; Mulvey et al., 2018). Bias-based bullying is problematic for several reasons: (a) it disproportionately affects immigrant youth (Stevens et al., 2020); (b) it is considered more harmful to the victim compared to general types of bullying (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017); and (c) it may occur more frequently because social exclusion based on minoritized group membership is viewed as more acceptable over more overt forms of bullying such as physical or verbal bullying (Hodson et al., 2010).

Socio-cultural and socio-cognitive theories suggest that societal anti-immigrant sentiment shapes social norms that promote bias-based discrimination, bullying, and violence targeting immigrant youth (Brenick & Halgunseth, 2017; Shah et al., 2021). Examining youth's perceptions of and responses to bias-based bullying is particularly timely considering the increased anti-immigrant sentiment and policies (e.g. the border wall with Mexico, the no-fly list targeting Arab countries) in the wake of the 2016 and 2020 United States (U.S.) presidential elections (Finley & Esposito, 2019; Williamson & Gelfand, 2019). Additionally, given that victims of

bias-based bullying are at increased risk for negative outcomes such as depression, anxiety, psychological distress, and problem behaviors (Weeks & Sullivan, 2019), it is important to examine how immigrant youth perceive and respond to victimization in school.

Past research has focused on the development of intergroup attitudes toward outgroup members, outcomes of bias-based bullying, and bystander perspectives on bias-based bullying (Caravita et al., 2019; Gönültaş & Mulvey, 2020). To our knowledge, no studies have examined youth's perspective taking of victims from varying racial-ethnic backgrounds who are being bullied in hypothetical scenarios and if these responses differ by youth gender, immigrant background, and the target victim's racial-ethnic im/migrant background. Similarly, previous research on how victimized youth respond to actual or real-life bullying (i.e. to whom they disclose their victimization to or turn for help) is limited and, to our knowledge, does not consider immigrant background or gender. Guided by socio-cultural and socio-cognitive theories, this study seeks to address these gaps in the literature by examining responses to bias-based bullying among middle school youth.

Theoretical frameworks

Socio-cultural (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Coll et al., 1996) and socio-cognitive theories (Crick & Dodge, 1996; Rutland et al., 2010) are useful frameworks from which to understand hypothetical and actual responses to bullying among immigrant youth. The bioecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) explains children's experiences of bullying victimization by taking into consideration how victimization may differ depending on historical context (chronosystem), socio-cultural factors (macrosystem), and children's characteristics such as immigrant background, gender, and ethnicity-race (microsystem). It posits that societal and historical contexts may perpetuate prejudice, discrimination, and victimization against immigrant children. Following the 2016 and 2020 elections, inhumane treatment of immigrant children and families occurred (e.g. increased use of family detention centers at the U.S. border and increased acts of violence targeting immigrant groups in general; Williamson & Gelfand, 2019). Hence, according to Bronfenbrenner (1979), these historical and socio-cultural events may make U.S. immigrant children particularly vulnerable to bias-based bullying during this time period and impact their cognition and behaviors. Indeed, research has found that immigrant children are more likely to experience bullying victimization compared to native born youth; and immigrant youth who experience bullying are more likely to report interpersonal, socioemotional, health, and substance use problems (Maynard et al., 2016).

In addition, the integrative model for minority child development (García Coll et al., 1996) highlights the developmental significance of social position variables (e.g. race, immigrant background, and gender) and associated contextual influences (e.g. prejudice, discrimination, and oppression) that shape minoritized children's competencies. It is particularly useful for understanding the role of gender in social positioning and how it may influence experiences and disclosure of bullying. According to the integrative model, immigrant and ethnically/racially minoritized youth in the U.S. are born into a marginalized social position based on characteristics such as their immigrant background, race, and/or gender (Coll et al., 1996). Based on their social position, they may be the target of prejudice, racism, and discrimination (Dessel, 2010; García Coll et al., 1996; Juvonen et al., 2006).

Moreover, socio-cognitive theories such as the social reasoning developmental perspective (SRD; Rutland et al., 2010) and social information processing (SIP; Crick & Dodge, 1996), are useful for understanding children's beliefs, perspectives, and responses to bias-based bullying by identifying cognitive processes that underlie children's decisions-making about intergroup relations. According to SRD, social-cognitive factors shape children's and adolescents' expression of prejudice in bullying contexts (see Brenick et al., 2022; Rutland et al., 2010). For example, majority group members may express and justify prejudice in order to preserve peer norms through bias-based victimization (see Brenick & Halgunseth, 2017; Gönültaş & Mulvey, 2020).

Also, moral disengagement (e.g. cognitively reframing situations and one's actions so that they appear congruent) is a cognitive process that influences responses to bias-based bullying by explaining the discrepancy between bullies' moral judgment of bullying as not acceptable and their actual or real-life response (Caravita et al., 2019). Ten and 12-year-old children responded to hypothetical bullying vignettes in which target victims were new students at the school. Despite the respondent's own immigrant background, moral disengagement was higher for non-immigrant than immigrant victims in the vignettes, indicating that the victimization of immigrants is more acceptable among youth. The finding that moral disengagement for bullying was lower for the hypothetical immigrant victims among immigrant participants as well (i.e. they felt as if it was more acceptable/feel less guilt) points to how immigrant youth may internalize the power inequalities of groups (Caravita et al., 2019). Thus, SRD may be useful for understanding the beliefs and intended actions of youth who are asked to respond from the perspective of the bullying victim, and if these responses vary by ethnic-racial background of the victim.

According to the SIP, youth's responses to bullying depend on values, working models of relationships, emotions, prior social knowledge, and various biological capabilities. In taking the perspective of a victim, an outsider may respond that the victim should tell a parent or teacher with the expectation that the bullying will end; however, from the victim's perspective, especially one from a minoritized group, the obvious choice is not always to tell an adult about the bullying (Bjereld et al., 2017; Graziano, 2012). Consistent with the SIP theory, hypothetical responses and actual disclosure of bullying often depends on past experiences with adults, feelings of not being heard, mistrust, or lack of confidence in those adults based on their past responses to similar situations in the past (Bjereld et al., 2017). Responses also depend on beliefs and values (Crick & Dodge, 1996). For collectivist cultures, youth may choose not to report bullying to promote or maintain harmonious interactions in group settings or between adults such as parents, teachers, and peers (Afable-Munsuz & Brindis, 2006; Phinney et al., 2000; Triandis, 1995).

Bias-based bullying

Bullying is defined as intentional and persistent physical, verbal, or psychological abuse or harm directed at victims in which there is an imbalance of power (Graham, 2016; Herráiz & Gutiérrez, 2017; Olweus, 1993). Given the increased importance of peers during early adolescence (Crockett et al., 1984) and high rates of bullying in middle school (Hicks et al., 2018), middle school is an important time to examine bias-based bullying. Bias-based bullying differs from general bullying in that it involves prejudice and discrimination-related aggression and victimization based on one's social identity and group membership of one or more marginalized groups (e.g. immigrant-origin, race or ethnicity, nationality, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or disability; Mulvey et al., 2018; Rosenthal et al., 2015). This study focuses on bias-based bullying in schools due to youth's immigrant origin because immigrant youth report experiencing more victimization, rejection, and isolation compared to their nonimmigrant peers (Plenty & Jonsson, 2017; Stevens et al., 2020). It is important to focus on bias-based bullying because it is a risk factor for numerous negative outcomes such as health-related quality of life, depression, anxiety, psychological distress, low self-esteem, and problem behaviors (Graham, 2002; Priest et al., 2013; Weeks & Sullivan, 2019).

The current study

Applying socio-cultural and socio-cognitive perspectives, in this study we investigated bias-based exclusionary bullying scenarios and responses to participants' own bullying experiences in middle school youth. We examined: (1) whether middle-schoolers' response strategies from the perspective of victims of bullying varied across three bias-based bullying scenarios by immigrant background and gender and by target victim's ethnic background; and (2) how youth's responses to their own actual bullying experiences, based on who they disclosed their experience to, varies

based on immigrant background and gender. While research shows that victimized youth do not report bullying to adults, in general (Bjereld et al., 2018; Brenick et al., 2022; Mishna et al., 2006), less is known about immigrant youth's experiences. More specifically, research has not taken socio-cultural contexts into account when considering the barriers immigrant youth may face in disclosing their bullying victimization. Based on the limited research on the topic, we addressed the following research questions:

1. How did middle school students respond to bias-based bullying scenarios from the perspective of hypothetical victims? Did these responses differ by gender and immigrant background? Did these responses differ by ethnicity of the hypothetical victim?
2. Did middle schoolers disclose their own bullying experiences and if so, to whom? Did these responses differ by gender and immigrant background?

Method

Participants

Secondary data were used for the present study. In the original sample, participants were 481 students (49% cisfemale; 15% immigrant; 36% minoritized race-ethnicity; $M_{\text{age}} = 13.28$, $SD = 0.87$) from six U.S. public middle schools with high immigrant populations in the Northeast with predominantly White student populations. All schools were located in areas with high immigrant populations and were working- to middle-class. Participants were considered immigrants if at least one of their parents was born in a country other than the U.S. Immigrant participants came from 30 countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, South America, and the Caribbean. Of the sample, 62% reported being White/European American, 8.9% Hispanic or Latinx, 8.7% Black/African American, and 3.4% Asian/Asian American. Regarding home language, 338 participants were English speaking, 17 were non-English speaking, and 27 were multilingual.

Procedure

This study was part of a broader research project on bias-based exclusion bullying and was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Connecticut under protocol number #H16-318. The primary investigator of the study approached nine school principals to participate in a study on bullying. Passive consent forms were sent home to parents of children in the six schools whose principals consented to participating in the study. Parents were given three weeks to review and return the form if they did not want their child to participate in the study. Only four parental forms were returned indicating that they did not want their child to participate in the study. On the day of administration, research assistants went to classrooms, explained the survey to the students, and read an information sheet. They explained the confidentiality of the study and that parental consent did not mean youth had to take part in the study. Additionally, research assistants clarified that even if students chose to take part in the survey, they did not have to answer any question they did not want to answer and they could drop out at any time. The research team answered all student questions. Students whose parents did not opt their children out of the study and who assented to participate completed a survey that took approximately 45 min to finish. Surveys were administered in social studies classes and were conducted in English. All students took the survey in English with no reported difficulty.

Measures

The survey included two sections, participants' responses to: (a) social exclusion vignettes from the im/migrant victim's perspective, and (b) their own bullying experiences.

Responses to hypothetical social exclusion scenarios from the victim's perspective

The surveys included hypothetical vignettes in which White perpetrators (i.e. excluder) excluded Arab or Latinx recent immigrants or Black recent migrants (i.e. targets) in school contexts. Each vignette was accompanied by a picture in which the excluder and victim's name were labeled. Participants' gender was matched with the gender of the characters (e.g. the victim) to facilitate the respondent's identification with the story. Each participant responded to three vignettes; each vignette consisted of one of the two immigrant (Arab or Latinx) or the one migrant (Black) target victims. One scenario involved the victim being told by the excluder that they could not sit at a lunch table with a group of peers even though there were empty seats. The second scenario involved the victim being told that they were not invited to a party. The last scenario involved the victim being told they could not join a game at recess. For each scenario, the excluder was explained to have engaged in this behavior repeatedly over the previous weeks.

To elicit a response from the victim's perspective, participants were asked to choose and rank order up to three out of eight possible responses, in which the response they numbered 1 would be the first thing they would do. The possible responses included: (1) I would call the excluder a name or make fun of them; (2) I would tell the excluder it's not their decision and ask the other kids; (3) I would hit the excluder; (4) I would tell an adult; (5) I wouldn't ask to play/join anymore; (6) I would talk to my friends about it; (7) I would tell the excluder it's not fair that I can't play/join; and (8) I wouldn't say anything, and I would leave (the table/basketball court). Some participants selected only one response, some selected three as directed, and others selected more than three. As a result, only the participants' first choice was included in the analyses.

Participants' responses to their own bullying experiences

After completing questions regarding hypothetical vignettes, participants were asked to report about their own bullying experiences. Then, they were asked 'Thinking about all types of bullying, did you tell anyone that you were bullied?' Participants could respond with: (a) I was not bullied (b) I was bullied, but I did not tell anyone; and (c) I told someone. If participants did tell someone they continued on to the next question and had the option to respond with (a) yes, I told a friend (b) yes, I told a parent; (c) yes, I told a teacher or other adult at school.

Participant demographics

Participants self-reported demographic variables including, gender, race, country of birth, and parents' countries of birth. The last two variables were used to determine immigrant background for the participants.

Results

Plan for analysis

First, an analysis of data missingness was conducted. The percentage of missing values was 4.6% for gender, 22% for data on the family cohesion item 'In our family we really get along well with each other' and missingness for most other variables ranged from 7%–14%. We addressed the problem of missing data using the 'principled' multiple imputation (MI) technique under the assumption that missing values were missing at random (Rezvan et al., 2015). A total of five imputations were carried out for missing data. Data were imputed with school belongingness, school climate, bullying responses, bullying experiences, perceptions of bullying climate, ethnic target scenarios of the vignettes, race, immigration background, gender, and age included as auxiliary variables. The imputed data set contained 2,814 observations and maintained the demographic breakdown of the original sample (51.2% cisfemale; 34% minoritized race-ethnicity; 15% immigrant). Of the sample, 62% reported being White, 8.9% Hispanic or Latinx, 8.7% Black/African American, and 3.4% Asian/Asian American.

Second, to address the first research question regarding gender, immigrant background, scenario, and victim response, a 3 (scenario target ethnicity: Arab, Latinx, Black) \times 8 (victim response: call a name, not their decision and ask other kids, hit, tell an adult, ask not to play/sit anymore, talk to friends, say it's not fair, say nothing and leave) \times 2 (gender: cisfemale, cismale) \times 2 (immigrant background: immigrant, nonimmigrant) analysis of variance (ANOVA) with repeated measures on the first two variables was conducted. Third, to address the research question regarding participants responses to whom they told about their bullying experiences, a 2 (gender: cisfemale, cismale) \times 2 (immigrant background: immigrant, nonimmigrant) \times 4 (whom they told: friend, teacher or other adult at school, parent, I didn't tell anyone) an ANOVA with repeated measures on whom they told was conducted. In instances where the sphericity assumption was not met, the Huynh-Feldt correction was used. Significant main and interaction effects were explored with pairwise comparisons, as appropriate. Bonferroni adjustments were used to control for Type I error inflation.

Responses to hypothetical bullying scenarios

Below, we report the significant results of the repeated measures ANOVA for the 8 responses to bullying vignettes (i.e. call excluder a name, not excluder's decision and ask other kids, hit excluder, tell an adult, not ask to play/sit anymore, talk to friends, say it's not fair, or say nothing and leave). The analyses yielded significant main effects for scenario target ethnicity ($p < .05$) and victim response ($p < .001$; Table 1; see Table 2 for *Ms* & *SDs*). However, these main effects were qualified by several two, three, and four-way interactions: Victim response by gender ($p < .01$); victim response by participant gender by participant immigrant background ($p < .001$); ethnic target scenario by victim response ($p < .001$); ethnic target scenario by victim response by gender ($p < .001$); ethnic target scenario by victim response by participant immigrant background ($p < .001$); and a four-way interaction between scenario target ethnicity by victim response by participant gender by participant immigrant background ($p < .001$; Table 1). The two-way interaction between victim response and immigrant background was not significant. Furthermore, because effects without victim response would indicate average response rates across all response types, only results including interactions with victim response can be meaningfully interpreted.

Pairwise comparisons with bonferroni adjustments probing the significant main effect for response indicated that, in general, a greater number of participants chose the response 'I would tell [the excluder] it's not fair' followed by the response 'I wouldn't say anything and I would

Table 1. Results of repeated measures ANOVA for victim response.

	Sum of squares	<i>df</i>	Mean square	<i>F</i>	η_p^2	<i>p</i>
Significant within-subjects effects						
ScenarioEthnic	.309	2	.154	4.23	.002	*
VictResponse	6444.55	7	92.08	246.72	.081	***
VictResponse \times Gender	54.02	7	7.72	20.68	.007	**
VictResponse \times Gender \times Immigrant	16.23	7	2.32	6.25	.002	***
Error(VictResponse)	7340.96	19,670	.373			
Scenario \times VictResponse	6.858	14	.659	3.62	.001	***
Scenario \times VictResponse \times Gender	10.62	14	.758	5.60	.002	***
Scenario \times VictResponse \times Immigrant	12.19	14	.870	6.42	.002	***
Scenario \times VictResponse \times Immigrant \times Gender	8.63	14	.616	4.55	.002	***
Error (Scenario \times VictResponse)	5330.08	29,224.01	.183			
Significant between-subject effects						
Gender \times Immigrant	2.493	1	2.49	10.17	.004	**
Error	688.92	2810	.245			

Note. Only significant effects are reported.
* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations for response selections by scenario target race-ethnicity and participant gender and immigrant background.

Scenario target race-ethnicity	Female participants				Male participants			
	Arab		Latinx		Black		Arab	
	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)
Imm.								
Response								
Call them a name	0.06 (0.23)	0.03 (0.17)	0.06 (0.23)	0.27 (0.44)	0.21 (0.41)	0.21 (0.41)	0.21 (0.41)	0.14 (0.31)
Not their decision	0.31 (0.47)	0.29 (0.45)	0.34 (0.48)	0.44 (0.50)	0.50 (0.50)	0.50 (0.50)	0.50 (0.50)	0.38 (0.34)
Hit them	0.03 (0.17)	0.00 (0.00)	0.03 (0.17)	0.18 (0.38)	0.24 (0.43)	0.24 (0.43)	0.24 (0.43)	0.11 (0.27)
Tell an adult	0.43 (0.50)	0.43 (0.50)	0.43 (0.50)	0.21 (0.41)	0.32 (0.47)	0.32 (0.47)	0.32 (0.47)	0.34 (0.39)
Don't ask anymore	0.46 (0.50)	0.43 (0.50)	0.29 (0.45)	0.29 (0.46)	0.41 (0.49)	0.38 (0.49)	0.38 (0.49)	0.36 (0.35)
Talk to friends	0.37 (0.48)	0.43 (0.50)	0.37 (0.48)	0.32 (0.47)	0.26 (0.44)	0.26 (0.44)	0.26 (0.44)	0.35 (0.37)
Say it's not fair	0.38 (0.49)	0.49 (0.50)	0.51 (0.50)	0.38 (0.49)	0.59 (0.49)	0.59 (0.49)	0.59 (0.49)	0.49 (0.38)
Say nothing/leave	0.46 (0.50)	0.51 (0.50)	0.57 (0.50)	0.44 (0.50)	0.38 (0.48)	0.38 (0.48)	0.38 (0.48)	0.46 (0.35)
Call them a name	0.09 (0.28)	0.07 (0.25)	0.06 (0.24)	0.12 (0.32)	0.10 (0.30)	0.10 (0.30)	0.10 (0.30)	0.09 (0.25)
Not their decision	0.33 (0.47)	0.39 (0.49)	0.40 (0.49)	0.42 (0.49)	0.40 (0.49)	0.40 (0.49)	0.40 (0.49)	0.37 (0.36)
Hit them	0.09 (0.28)	0.07 (0.26)	0.08 (0.27)	0.13 (0.34)	0.11 (0.32)	0.11 (0.32)	0.11 (0.32)	0.10 (0.25)
Tell an adult	0.40 (0.49)	0.41 (0.49)	0.38 (0.49)	0.35 (0.48)	0.34 (0.48)	0.34 (0.48)	0.34 (0.48)	0.37 (0.40)
Don't ask anymore	0.35 (0.48)	0.37 (0.48)	0.40 (0.49)	0.35 (0.48)	0.36 (0.48)	0.36 (0.48)	0.36 (0.48)	0.36 (0.35)
Talk to friends	0.48 (0.50)	0.37 (0.48)	0.41 (0.49)	0.35 (0.48)	0.39 (0.49)	0.39 (0.49)	0.39 (0.49)	0.39 (0.38)
Say it's not fair	0.52 (0.50)	0.55 (0.50)	0.47 (0.50)	0.52 (0.50)	0.49 (0.50)	0.49 (0.50)	0.49 (0.50)	0.51 (0.38)
Say nothing/leave	0.43 (0.50)	0.50 (0.50)	0.50 (0.50)	0.41 (0.49)	0.43 (0.49)	0.43 (0.49)	0.43 (0.49)	0.44 (0.38)
Overall		Female		Male		Total Overall		
Call them a name		0.07 (0.20)		0.13 (0.30)		0.10 (0.25)		
Not their decision		0.36 (0.35)		0.40 (0.36)		0.35 (0.35)		
Hit them		0.07 (0.23)		0.13 (0.28)		0.10 (0.25)		
Tell an adult		0.40 (0.41)		0.33 (0.38)		0.34 (0.40)		
Don't ask anymore		0.38 (0.35)		0.36 (0.35)		0.34 (0.35)		
Talk to friends		0.42 (0.39)		0.36 (0.37)		0.36 (0.38)		
Say it's not fair		0.51 (0.39)		0.51 (0.37)		0.47 (0.39)		
Say nothing/leave		0.48 (0.39)		0.42 (0.36)		0.42 (0.38)		

Note. Imm. = Participants with immigrant background; Non-Imm. = participants with nonimmigrant background.

leave' and fewest participants chose to 'hit [the excluder]' or '... call [the excluder] a name or make fun of them'. All significant differences in response type were at the $p < .001$ level. However, these results were qualified by a two-way gender by victim response interaction (Table 1; see Table 2 for all Ms and SDs), which was further qualified by a three-way interaction between gender, immigrant background, and victim response. Follow-up analyses revealed that immigrant girls were least likely to select 'hit [the excluder]' ($p < .001$) and 'call excluder a name' ($p < .001$). Immigrant boys most frequently selected 'call excluder name or make fun of them' ($p < .05$), 'tell excluder it's not their decision, ask[ing] other kids' ($p < .01$), or 'hit [the excluder]' ($p < .01$). Nonimmigrant boys, however, most frequently chose the response, 'tell an adult' ($p < .001$). Nonimmigrant girls were most likely to respond by 'tell[ing the excluder] it's not their decision, ask[ing] other kids' ($p < .001$) and 'hit[ting the excluder]' ($p < .001$). See Table 2 for all Ms and SDs.

Finally, these significant interactions need to be interpreted further through the four-way interaction between gender, immigrant background, scenario target ethnicity, and victim response. Follow-up analyses of this four-way interaction were conducted by examining differences across individual victim responses to each of the bullying scenario vignettes. Pairwise comparisons revealed that nonimmigrant boys selected the response, 'call [the excluder] a name or make fun of them', significantly more often for Arab and Latinx victims than for Black victims (see Figure 1). In contrast, immigrant boys selected this response significantly more often for Latinx targets than for Arab or Black targets. Immigrant girls selected 'call [the excluder] a name or make fun of them' for Arab victims significantly more than Black victims. There were no significant differences in this response across the three scenarios for nonimmigrant girls (see Table 2 for all Ms and SDs).

For the second response, 'tell [the excluder] it's not their decision and ask the other kids', there were no significant differences across scenarios for immigrant boys and girls (see Figure 2). In contrast, a greater number of nonimmigrant boys selected 'tell [the excluder] it's not their decision and ask the other kids' for Arab and Black victims compared to Latinx victims.

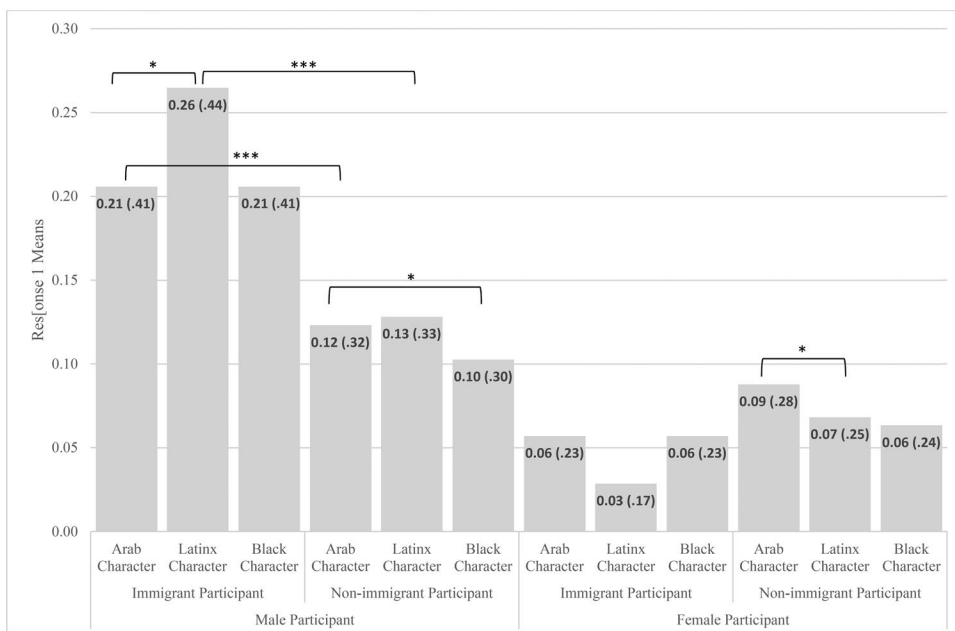


Figure 1. Interaction between ethnic target scenario, victim response 'I would call 'excluder' a name or make fun of them', participant gender, and participant immigrant background. Note. Bars represent mean proportion use of response. Means and standard deviations are presented within each bar Mean (SD). Brackets indicate significant differences in use of responses; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

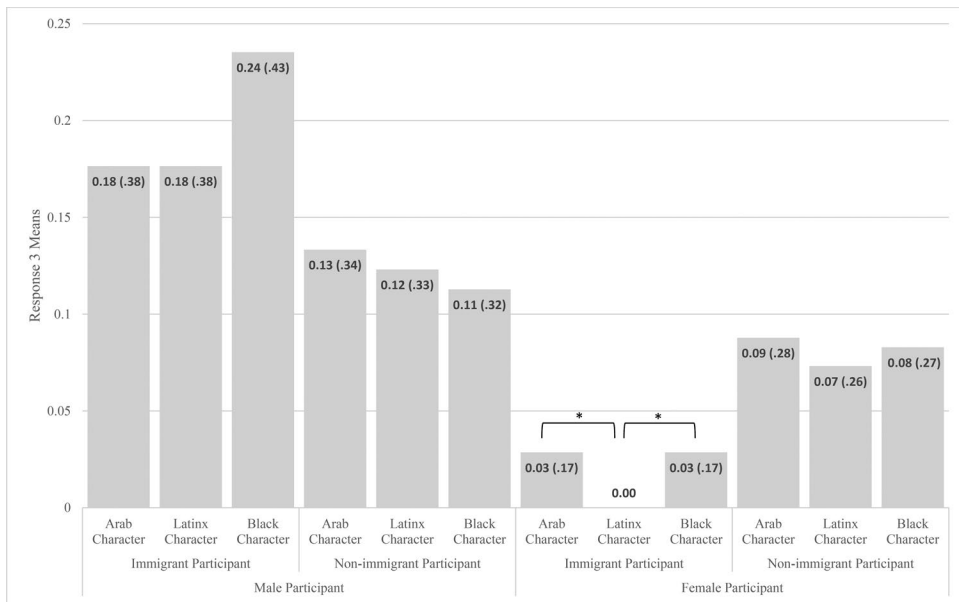


Figure 2. Interaction between ethnic target scenario, victim response ‘I would hit the excluder’, participant gender, and participant immigrant background. Note. Bars represent mean proportion use of response. Means and standard deviations are presented within each bar Mean (SD). Brackets indicate significant differences in use of responses; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Nonimmigrant girls selected this response more frequently for Latinx and Black victims compared to Arab victims (see supplemental material). Follow-up pairwise comparisons for the third response, ‘hit [the excluder]’ revealed no significant differences for nonimmigrant and immigrant boys in addition to nonimmigrant girls. However, immigrant girls did not select ‘hit [the excluder]’ for Latinx victims as compared to Arab or Black victims (see Table 2 for all Ms and SDs).

The fourth response, ‘tell an adult’, revealed no significant differences across scenarios for nonimmigrant boys and immigrant girls (see Figure 3). Immigrant boys selected ‘tell an adult’ for Black victims and Arab victims significantly more than for Latinx victims. In contrast, non-immigrant girls were significantly more likely to select ‘tell an adult’ for Latinx victims compared to Black victims (see Table 2 for all Ms and SDs).

Regarding the response, ‘don’t ask to play/sit with anymore’, follow-up analyses revealed no significant differences across scenarios for nonimmigrant boys (see supplemental materials). Immigrant boys selected ‘don’t ask to play/sit with anymore’ more frequently for Latinx victims compared to Arab victims. Showing a different pattern, immigrant girls selected this response more often for Arab and Latinx victims than for Black victims. Demonstrating yet another pattern, nonimmigrant girls selected this response more frequently for Black victims than for Arab victims (see Table 2 for all Ms and SDs).

Follow-up analyses of the response ‘talk to my friends’ revealed that nonimmigrant boys more frequently selected ‘talk to my friends’ for Black victims compared to Latinx victims (see supplemental materials). In contrast, immigrant boys selected ‘talk to my friends’ more frequently for Latinx victims compared to Arab and Black victims. Moreover, nonimmigrant girls selected ‘talk to my friends’ most frequently for Arab, then Black, then Latinx victims at rates that were all statistically significant from one another. There were no significant differences across scenarios in the use of this response for immigrant girls (see Table 2 for all Ms and SDs).

The seventh response, ‘tell excluder it’s not fair that I can’t play/sit with them’, revealed no significant differences across scenarios for nonimmigrant boys and immigrant girls (see supplemental materials). Immigrant boys chose ‘tell excluder it’s not fair that I can’t play/sit with

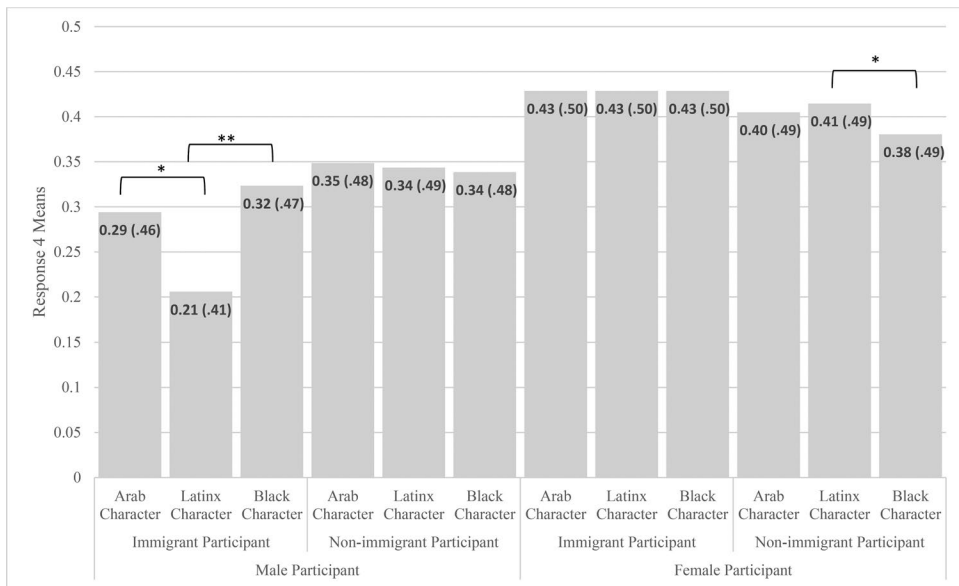


Figure 3. Interaction between scenario target ethnicity, victim response ‘tell an adult’, participant gender, and participant immigrant background. *Note.* Bars represent mean proportion use of response. Means and standard deviations are presented within each bar *Mean (SD)*. Brackets indicate significant differences in use of responses; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

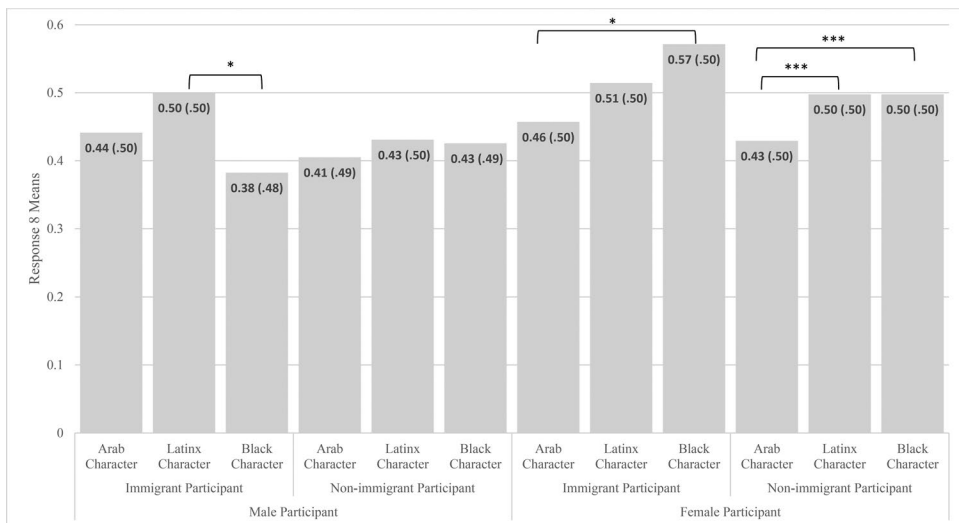


Figure 4. Interaction between ethnic target scenario, victim response ‘I wouldn’t say anything and I would leave’, participant gender, and participant immigrant group. *Note.* Bars represent mean proportion use of response. Means and standard deviations are presented within each bar *Mean (SD)*. Brackets indicate significant differences in use of responses; * $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$, **** $p < 0.001$.

them’ more frequently for the Black victim compared to the Arab and Latinx victims. Nonimmigrant girls more frequently chose ‘tell excluder it’s not fair that I can’t play/sit with them’ for Arab and Latinx victims compared to Black victims (see Table 2 for all *Ms* and *SDs*).

Finally, the follow-up analyses of ‘don’t say anything and leave’ revealed no significant differences across scenarios for nonimmigrant boys (see Figure 4). Immigrant boys were more frequently selected ‘don’t say anything and leave’ for Latinx compared to Black victims, however. Nonimmigrant girls selected ‘don’t say anything and leave’ more frequently for Latinx and Black

victims than Arab victims. Immigrant girls chose ‘*don’t say anything and leave*’ more frequently for Black victims than for Arab and Latinx victims (see Table 2 for all *Ms* and *SDs*).

Response behaviors to actual bullying experiences

Below, we report the significant results of the repeated measure ANOVA of the four response types (told a friend, told a teacher or other adult at school, told a parent, or I didn’t tell anyone) to participants’ actual bullying experiences. The analyses yielded significant main effects for gender, $F(1, 2810) = 20.31, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.01$, immigrant background, $F(1, 2810) = 3.87, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = 0.001$, and response, that is to whom participants told, $F(3, 8430) = 53.93, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.01$. The interactions of response by immigrant status and response by gender, respectively, were not significant. However, there was a significant three-way interaction between immigrant status, gender, and response, $F(3, 8430) = 9.11, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.003$. In general, across immigrant group and gender, more participants selected the response ‘*I was bullied, but I did not tell anyone*’ ($M = .32, SD = .47$) and fewer participants, on average, chose ‘*I told a teacher or other adult at school*’ ($M = .12, SD = .33, p < .001$).

Immigrant girls had the highest rate of ‘*telling no one*’ compared to all other participant groups (see Figure 5). Immigrant girls selected ‘*tell a teacher or other adult at school*’ the least frequently compared to all other options. Nonimmigrant girls selected ‘*tell no one*’ more frequently than ‘*tell a teacher*’ or ‘*tell a peer*’. Nonimmigrant girls also selected ‘*tell a parent*’ more frequently than ‘*tell a peer*’ or ‘*tell a teacher*’. Immigrant boys reported they would tell their teachers and other adults at the school less than all response options. Specifically, immigrant boys more frequently chose ‘*tell their parents*’ significantly more than ‘*tell teachers or other adults in the school*’. In contrast, nonimmigrant boys reported ‘*telling a friend*’ or ‘*telling a parent*’ significantly more than ‘*I did not tell anyone*’ or ‘*telling an adult at the school*’ (see Figure 5).

Discussion

This study tackled the timely and important topic of bias-based bullying of immigrant youth, contextualizing immigrant background, gender, and hypothetical bullying victims’ ethno-im/migrant background with participants’ hypothetical and actual bullying response behaviors. Immigrant youth are frequent targets of bias-based bullying and victims of bias-based bullying are at increased risk for various negative outcomes such as depression, anxiety, psychological distress, and problem behaviors (Maynard et al., 2016; Weeks & Sullivan, 2019). Critically, the manner in which a victim responds to bullying can greatly impact both the duration of bullying and negative consequences with which it is associated (Hymel & Swearer, 2015; Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2015). The novel findings of this study advance our knowledge on bias-based bullying among immigrant middle schoolers by revealing the complexity of victim response strategy selections. We found that middle schoolers’ responses to hypothetical bullying scenarios and to their actual experiences of being bullied do, in fact, differ according to their own immigrant background and gender as well as the ethno-im/migrant background of the victim in the hypothetical bullying scenario. Most striking, immigrant girls and boys selected response strategies for the Latinx victims in the hypothetical scenarios that were in line with cultural norms of Latinx youth (Morales, 2020; Sanchez et al., 2020). Nonimmigrant girls and boys selected responses that took self-advocacy and support-seeking out of the hands of the hypothetical Latino and Black victims, respectively. Another important finding also revealed that immigrant girls, in particular, frequently do not report their personal experiences of being bullied. Taken together these findings have significant implications for the development of immigrant youth and for school policies seeking to prevent bias-based bullying among middle schoolers.

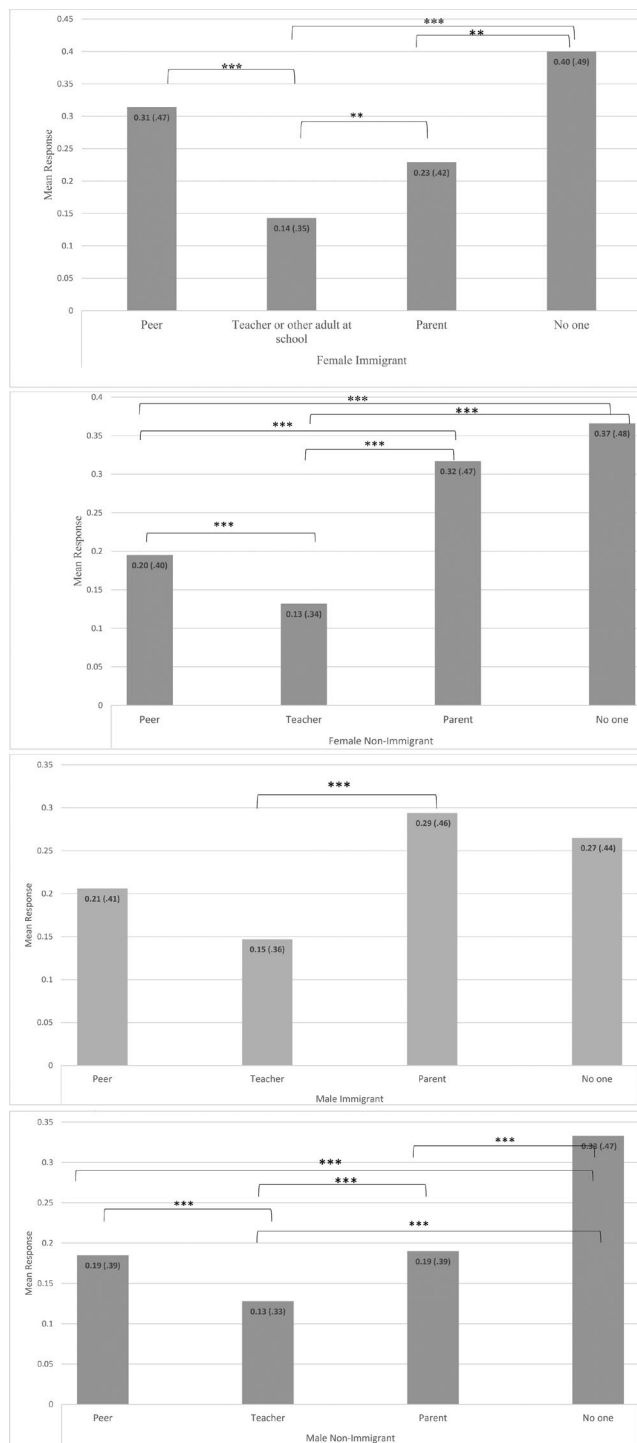


Figure 5. Participants actual disclosure of victimization. (A) Female immigrant disclosure. Note. Bars represent mean proportion use of responses; Means and standard deviations are presented within each bar *Mean (SD)*; Brackets indicate significant differences in use of responses; $*p < 0.05$, $**p < 0.01$, $***p < 0.001$. (B) Female nonimmigrant disclosure. Note. Bars represent mean proportion use of responses; Means and standard deviations are presented within each bar *Mean (SD)*; Brackets indicate significant differences in use of responses; $*p < 0.05$, $**p < 0.01$, $***p < 0.001$. (C) Male immigrant disclosure. Note. Bars represent mean proportion use of responses; Means and standard deviations are presented within each bar *Mean (SD)*; Brackets indicate significant differences in use of responses; $*p < 0.05$, $**p < 0.01$, $***p < 0.001$. (D) Male nonimmigrant disclosure. Note. Bars represent mean proportion use of responses; Means and standard deviations are presented within each bar *Mean (SD)*; Brackets indicate significant differences in use of responses; $*p < 0.05$, $**p < 0.01$, $***p < 0.001$.

Responses to hypothetical bullying scenarios

These findings extend our understanding on how immigrant background and gender influence middle schoolers' responses to hypothetical scenarios of bullying in which the hypothetical victims are of varying im/migrant and ethnic-racial backgrounds. As a reminder, gender was matched between the vignette characters and the participants; and middle schoolers were told that the Arab and Latinx hypothetical victims were immigrants to the U.S., whereas the Black hypothetical victim had migrated from another U.S. state.

Our findings revealed that *none* of the immigrant middle school girls in this study chose to 'hit [the excluder]' when asked to take the perspective of the hypothetical Latina victim in the scenario (i.e. mean score of 0), which was significantly lower than all other groups (i.e. immigrant boys and nonimmigrant boys and girls) and significantly lower than if the hypothetical victim was Arab or Black. This finding supports social reasoning developmental theory (SRD) and is in line with the literature on *marianismo*, a cultural belief in Latin America in which Latinas are expected to be passive, subordinate, and self-sacrificing (Morales, 2020). From the SRD perspective, it is possible that immigrant girls are influenced to choose certain responses to bullying based on the internalized norms that they have about a group (Rutland et al., 2010). It is possible that the immigrant girls in this study were aware of and had internalized norms of Latinas' passive behaviors in relation to conflict, and these norms are influenced by cultural context and values such as *marianismo*.

On the other hand, immigrant boys were more likely to choose that they would 'call [the excluder] a name' and were less likely to choose that they would 'tell an adult' when asked to take the perspective of a hypothetical immigrant Latino victim in the bullying scenario compared to when they were asked to take the perspective of the Black or immigrant Arab victim. Sociocognitive and sociocultural theories may help us understand these findings. A premise to both theories is that cultural context shapes norms, such as gender norms, as well as adolescents' decisions, behaviors, and intergroup processes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rutland et al., 2010). *Machismo* is a widely studied gender norm that is associated with the behaviors of Latinos and emphasizes the importance of physical strength, courage, honor, independence, and dominance (Arciniega et al., 2008; Sanchez et al., 2020). When asked to take the perspective of a hypothetical Latino immigrant, immigrant boy middle schoolers may have chosen that the hypothetical victim would 'call [the excluder] a name' because of the widely understood concept of *machismo* in relation to Latino males.

However, it is also important to acknowledge the influence of the microsystem and (Arciniega et al., 2008) the chronosystem, or history, on the finding that immigrant boys were less likely to choose that they would 'tell an adult' from the perspective of a hypothetical immigrant Latino victim. First, within the school microsystem immigrant youth—particularly immigrant youth of color—are more likely to receive more severe and punitive disciplinary action by school officials (e.g. teachers, staff, administrators) for the same behavioral infractions as their White counterparts (Brenick et al., 2020; Peguero et al., 2015). Furthermore, youth of color are frequently treated as perpetrators in acts of bullying even when they are, in fact, the victims (Graham & Juvonen, 2002). This creates a sense of distrust with how school officials would handle instances of bullying victimization (Bjereld et al., 2017). Second, the data for this project was collected after the 2016 election, when anti-immigrant sentiment peaked and the implementation of a 'Zero Tolerance' immigrant enforcement policy separated thousands of immigrant families (Bouza et al., 2018). Thus, it is not surprising that immigrant boys would believe that an immigrant Latino boy would opt not to bring his problems to adults outside of his family and would not escalate a response beyond 'call[ing the excluder] a name' given the sociopolitical context at the time and the fear of bringing negative attention to himself and his family. These findings are important considering that immigrant boy youth are more likely to experience bullying than nonimmigrant boys (Maynard et al., 2016) and research demonstrating that Latinx

adolescents' views of themselves and their opportunities are influenced by social perception of legal status (Gonzalez et al., 2015).

The pattern of findings with nonimmigrant boys differed from immigrant boys in interesting ways. When asked to take the perspective of the immigrant Latino hypothetical victim, non-immigrant boys were less likely to choose that the victim would '*call [the excluder] a name*'; '*talk to friends*'; or '*tell [the excluder] it was not their decision*' to exclude others compared to when they took the perspective of the Black and/or immigrant Arab victim. These findings suggest that nonimmigrant boys perceived that Latino immigrant victims would not advocate for themselves or seek peer support as opposed to Black and/or immigrant Arab victims of bullying. Anti-immigrant sentiment and rhetoric indicative of the macrosystem, specifically anti-Latinx at the time of this study, may play a role in how nonimmigrant youth view bias-based bullying and whether they see it is more acceptable or normalized for immigrant groups (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Lastly, nonimmigrant girls were *less* likely to choose that Black female and Latina victims should '*tell [the excluder] it was not their decision*' to exclude others in the hypothetical scenario than the immigrant Arab victim. Additionally, they were more likely to choose that the Black female victim would '*not ask to participate anymore*' than when they took the perspective of the immigrant Arab victim. These patterns suggest a perception by nonimmigrant girls that Black youth, and at times immigrant Latina youth, when faced with exclusionary bullying, should not advocate for themselves, enact agency, or insist that they be treated fairly. SRD would suggest that youth are exposed to and internalize prejudice and power inequalities toward groups that alter whether they think an ethnic target victim should respond aggressively or more passively (Rutland et al., 2010).

Response behaviors to actual or real-life bullying experiences

Notably, immigrant girls reported the highest rates of having told 'no one' about their own actual bullying victimization compared to all other groups in the study. This finding warrants serious attention from prevention programs seeking to reduce bullying in and outside of schools. A small qualitative study found that Latina immigrant youth did not report their victimization experiences for two reasons: (a) they did not want to cause additional stress for their parents who were already stressed for reasons such as financial or work load; and (b) they did not believe it would be effective in reducing bullying because of the language barriers their immigrant parents would encounter with school officials (Halgunseth et al., 2022). More qualitative research is needed to better understand why immigrant girls may not report incidents in which they are the victim of bullying; and prevention programs in schools should seek ways to encourage reporting policies that feel safe and comfortable for immigrant girls being bullied. Given the detrimental developmental consequences of being bullied, it is important that incidences do not go unnoticed and unaddressed (Maynard et al., 2016).

Similarly, nonimmigrant girls reported that they were more likely to have told no one about their bullying victimization; however, unlike immigrant girls, nonimmigrant girls who did tell someone about their victimization were more likely to report having told a parent more often than having told a teacher or friend. It is interesting to note that immigrant boys and nonimmigrant boys were also more likely to have told a parent about their bullying victimization more than teachers and other adults. As discussed above, it is possible that some immigrant girls may be particularly hesitant to inform their parents about their bullying victimization experiences even more so than immigrant boys or nonimmigrant boys and girls because of the fear of adding additional stress on their immigrant parents (Halgunseth et al., 2022).

The responses of immigrant and nonimmigrant boys were also notable. As mentioned earlier, both groups reported having told their parents about their victimization experiences more than other options (e.g. teachers or other adults). However, one notable difference between the two male groups was that nonimmigrant boys reported also having told friends about their

victimization experiences more often than having told no one or an adult at school. This was not true for immigrant boys. Thus, findings indicate that immigrant boys tend to tell their parents about victimization as their primary course of action. The relatively higher rates of telling their parents about their bullying experiences may be driven by school contact with parents. Research has found that youth of color are often disciplined by school officials and treated as the perpetrator, even if they are in reality the victim of the bullying (Graham & Juvonen, 2002). Minoritized immigrant youth are generally recipients of discriminatory disparate discipline (Brenick et al., 2020; Peguero et al., 2015). The unequal treatment in disciplinary actions may be a reason for low reports of bullying to school officials such as teachers by immigrant boys. This inequity not only fuels distrust within the educational system, but also feeds the school-to-prison pipeline (Peguero et al., 2015). Thus, it is important that the discipline of bullying in schools and elsewhere do not unfairly target youth of color or of immigrant background.

Limitations and future directions

Notwithstanding novel contributions, there were limitations to this study. First, while the current findings provide some evidence to how middle school youth might respond in hypothetical vignettes and to whom they did respond when actually bullied, the response options included for both parts of the study (hypothetical vs. actual) were similar but not perfectly matched (due to using established measures), making them difficult to compare. Second, findings should be interpreted with caution because data consisted primarily of youth self-reports to both hypothetical and real bullying experiences, which may lead to issues of shared method variance. Third, the current study was assessed using cross-sectional data; therefore, causal inferences cannot be made. Future research should assess victim responses and actual bullying experiences longitudinally. Fourth, findings cannot be generalized across other types of bullying experienced by immigrant youth (e.g. cyber, physical) since they were not measured in this study. Additional studies should assess how the type of bullying might affect our pattern of findings. Fifth, the small sample size of this study did not allow us to examine findings by important demographic variables (e.g. English language and who participants live with); when we attempted to examine these variables, it yielded highly unequal group sizes with unequal variances. Future studies should use data sets with larger sample sizes or oversample for variables of interest in order to consider the influence of constructs such as: family income, marital status, parental education, English language proficiency, and family structure, as well as other minoritized immigrant and ethnic groups. Despite these limitations, the results of the current study have important implications for intervention and future research in schools.

Implications for practitioners and prevention interventionists

Our results provide a fundamental framework to inform bullying prevention programs that are more effective for immigrant youth populations. Based on our findings that most immigrant youth choose not to disclose their bullying victimization to teachers or other adults in schools, it is essential for prevention programs to focus on teaching families strategies for early detection, encouraging youth reporting to trusted adults, and increasing school and family awareness of bullying victimization. Additionally, our results point to the importance of creating culturally sensitive interventions for immigrant children and their families. These interventions can highlight barriers immigrant parents may face in awareness of their child's school life, and work to improve student-teacher and parent-teacher relationships in regard to managing children's bullying victimization. For example, one barrier immigrant parents face in school awareness are cultural differences that lead to miscommunication and conflict with teachers

(Antony-Newman, 2019). Schools should take cultural factors into consideration that influence communication with parents and draw on values that emphasize interdependence. Because immigrant girls had the highest rates of having not told anyone about their victimization, special attention should be given to creating programs or policies that foster relationship- and trust-building between immigrant girls and school staff (e.g. teachers, administrators). Lastly, implementing anti-bullying programs, especially ones that encourage intergroup contact and increase cultural understanding, are highly important to prevent bias-based bullying (Brenick & Halgunseth, 2017; Rutland et al., 2010).

Conclusion

To our knowledge, few, if any, studies to date have examined how immigrant youth respond to bias-based bullying from the victim's perspective and none have compared these results to youth's actual bullying response strategies. Therefore, the finding that these responses differed by immigrant background and gender provide a unique contribution to the bullying literature. As explained by both sociocultural and sociocognitive theories, results suggest that group norms, school context, and historical context influence the responses middle schoolers select when asked to take the perspective of hypothetical victims differing by immigrant background and gender, particularly when hypothetical victims were Latinx (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Crick & Dodge, 1996; García Coll et al., 1996; Rutland et al., 2010). Given the detrimental consequences of bullying, it is critical that researchers and practitioners identify and address cultural obstacles that are preventing immigrant girls, in particular, from reporting their victimization experiences to parents, friends, and school officials. Addressing cultural obstacles (e.g. language obstacles) that prevent immigrant parents from notifying school officials about their children's bullying experiences is a potentially valuable area to address under-reporting of victimization, considering that immigrant boys do seem to communicate with parents about their victimization experiences. Understanding the complex ways in which immigrant and non-immigrant youth believe that they should and actually do respond to bias-based bullying guides policy, practitioners, and families in providing comprehensive, developmentally, contextually/intersectionally, and culturally sound support, prevention, and intervention efforts to ensure the safety and well-being of these youth, particularly those, like immigrant girls, who presently are the least likely to report their bullying experiences.

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Data availability statement

Due to the nature of this research, participants of this study did not agree for their data to be shared publicly, so supporting data is not available.

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