

# Adolescent bystander intervention in subtle and explicit racist incidents

Sally Palmer & Lindsey Cameron  
University of Kent, UK



# Racism in the UK

- Name-calling (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002; Aboud & Joong, 2007)
- Politics, history, immigration, demographics (Nigbur et al, 2008)
- Increasing, particularly towards immigrants and religious groups (Morris, 2008; Vaughn, 2009)



# Effects of racism

- Well-being, self-esteem etc (Martinez & Dukes, 1997; Fisher, Wallace & Fenton, 2000; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002; Britt, Kurtz-Costes & Rowley, 2007)
- Negatively correlated with depression and hopelessness (Phinney, Cantu & Kurtz, 1997)
- Bystander well-being (Fisher et al, 2000)



# Tackling racism

**Who  
Do  
We  
Think  
We  
Are?**

**Show  
Racism  
the  
Red  
Card**

- Current strategies:
  - Citizenship
  - Government policy
  - Peer mentoring
  - Charity work
- Sustainable and continuous (Lemos, 2005)
- Creating assertive bystanders (Aboud & Joong, 2007)

# Child bystander intervention studies

- Peer intervention happens 19% of the time (Hawkins et al, 2001)
- Unwillingness to report bullying incidents (Whitney & Smith, 1993)
- Negative or neutral attitudes towards bullies (Sutton & Smith, 1999)
- Norms of intergroup discrimination (Aboud & Joong, 2007)



# Intergroup friendships

- Allport (1954) Contact theory
- Pettigrew (1998) intergroup friendships reduce prejudice and anxiety
- Implications of intergroup friendship for increased likelihood of bystander intervention



# Study 1 - Interviews

- Individual interviews and focus groups of 3
- N=160
- 6 Schools in Sandwell (Birmingham, UK)
- Year 8 (aged 12-13) and Year 10 (aged 14-15)
- Transcribed and thematically analysed using Nvivo





# Resources

- Semi-structured
- THEME 1: What? Where? Who? How much?
- THEME 2: Feelings and Behaviour
- THEME 3: Strategies
- Bystander scenario:

“Imagine you are with a group of friends and one of them says something racist about someone else.”
- Friends, family, strangers...



## Sad Eyes

My friend has sad eyes,  
Someone teased him about his race.

I said to that person,  
'It doesn't matter what race you are,  
It doesn't matter what religion you are...'



“...Every now and again, once every three months or something, something comes up, like people just call some people names, like if I'm with a group of Black people or mixed race people, they give dirty looks or say bad words.”



“Racism is when someone discriminates against someone because of the colour of their skin, their religion, or their culture. It is a form of prejudice. This is when someone holds negative attitudes or beliefs, and/or displays hostile or discriminatory behaviour towards a member of a group, just because they are a member of that group.”

# Interviews – general themes

- Pupils reported frequent bystander experiences of racism
- Understanding of racism as a form of bullying
- Subtle and explicit forms of racism

-Jokes  
-Mimicking  
-Stereotypes

-Violence  
-Gang fights  
-Weapons

- Evidence of normalisation
- Intention to intervene but few reported experiences of intervening



# Study 2 - Questionnaire

- N=1210
- 7 Secondary schools
- Year 8 and 10
- 626 Males; 574 females
- Ethnically diverse
- DV: Bystander response to verbal or physically racist scenario



Information about the questionnaire

Completing this questionnaire means you will be helping us find out more about young people's experiences of racism.

These questions are about:

- Your ethnic or racial background 
- How you feel about yourself as a person 
- Your experiences of discrimination (if any) 
- What you think about the future 

- This questionnaire is quick and really easy to do, just put your initial reaction to the question.
- You can stop at any time, and don't have to give a reason. Put your hand up and someone will come over to you.
- All of your answers are confidential – no one will find out that these are your answers (not your teachers, your parents or your school) – so please just write what you think.
- This is not a test – there are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions, just write whatever you think.
- Do you have any questions? Are you happy to complete this questionnaire? If you would like any more information then please put up your hand and someone will come and help you.

1

# Measures

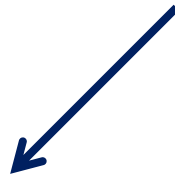
- Rosenberg (1965) **self-esteem** scale (10 items)
- **Academic competence**, adapted from Fuligni (1997)
- **Parental support** measure (Racial Bias Preparation Scale (RBPS) Hughes & Chen, 1997)
- Multigroup **Ethnic Identification** Measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992)
- **Bystander response** measure
- **Friendship** homogeneity measure
- **What is racism?** measure
- **Experience of racism** (Adolescent Discrimination Distress Index (ADDI); Fisher, Wallace & Fenton, 2000)

# Bystander scenario

“Imagine that you are walking down the corridor at the end of the school day, and you hear someone say something nasty to somebody else, because they are of a different ethnic background to them... **What would you do?**”

1.	I would ignore the comment and walk away
2.	I would tell a teacher or member of staff what the person had said
3.	I would tell the person that they should not be saying nasty things about someone else's ethnic/racial background
4.	I would tell a friend what the person had said
5.	I would tell a member of my family what the person had said
6.	I would start a fight with the person who said something nasty, immediately or later on
7.	I would call the bully something nasty, to do with their ethnic/racial background
8.	I wouldn't get involved, but I would watch

- No Action
- Action
- Aggressive
- Action
- Non-
- Aggressive



# Friendship measure

- 1-5 items (homogeneity – heterogeneity)

1. Think about your friendship group in school. (Tick one box only).

☐

I only have friends from the SAME ethnic/racial background as me.

☐

ALMOST ALL my friends are from the same ethnic/racial background as me. I have one or two friends from different ethnic/racial backgrounds.

☐

About HALF my friends are from the same ethnic/racial background as me, and half are from different ethnic/racial backgrounds.

☐

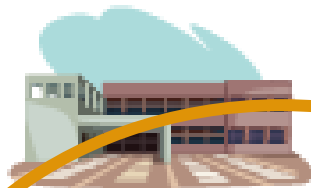
ALMOST ALL my friends are from different ethnic/racial backgrounds to me. I have one or two friends who are the same ethnic/racial background as me.

☐





I only have friends from DIFFERENT ethnic/racial backgrounds to me.

# Experience of racism

- Adapted ADDI scale (14 items)



This first set of questions is about how YOU have felt if someone has been racist towards YOU when you were in school.

1	Have people ever acted as if they're afraid of you, because of your ethnic/racial background?	YES 	I wasn't upset at all	I was upset a bit	I was upset	I was quite upset	I was extremely upset
		NO 	Go to the next question!				
2	Have other students ever acted as if you are not smart, because of your ethnic/racial background?	YES 	I wasn't upset at all	I was upset a bit	I was upset	I was quite upset	I was extremely upset
		NO 	Go to the next question!				



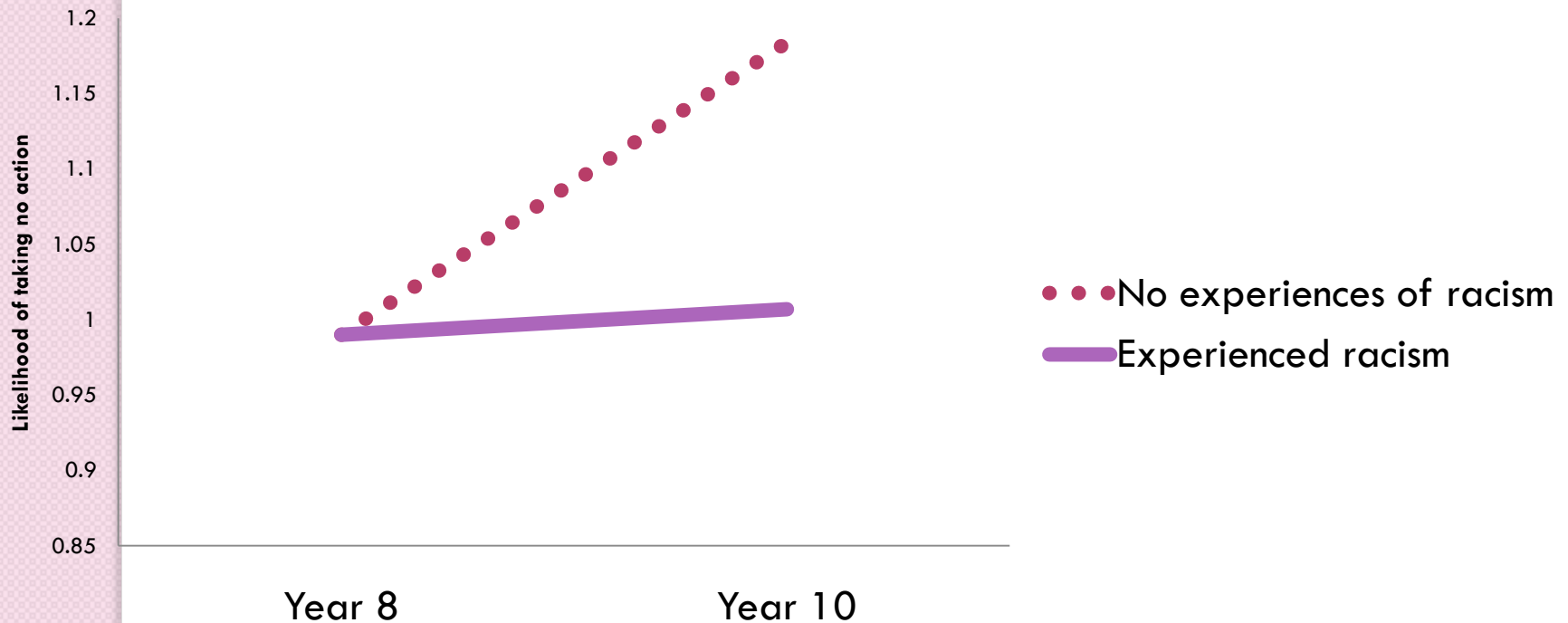
# Correlations

- Standing up to the perpetrator (verbal) correlated with telling a friend ( $r=.272, p<.001$ )
- Racism witnessed in school is negatively correlated with reporting physical racism to staff ( $r=-.084, p<.001$ )
- Watching a physical racist incident is negatively correlated with reporting it to staff ( $r=-.102, p<.001$ )
- Total experience of physical racism correlated with fighting the perpetrator ( $r=.207, p<.001$ )

# Result 1

- Reports of taking 'No Action' according to year group and experience of racism (Verbal/Physical repeated measures)

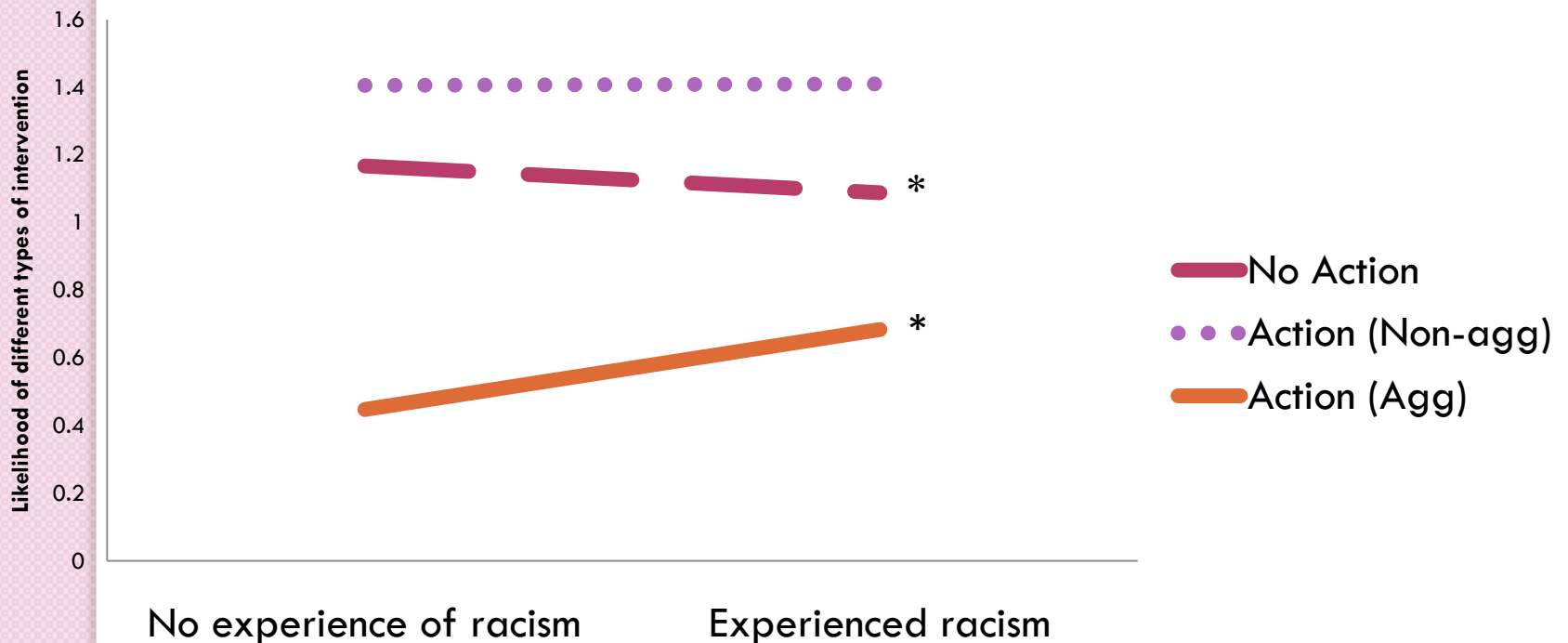
**Interaction between year group and participants' experience of racism**



## Result 2

- Verbal scenario only: Type of intervention and experience of racism:  $F(2, 854) = 10.098, p < .001$

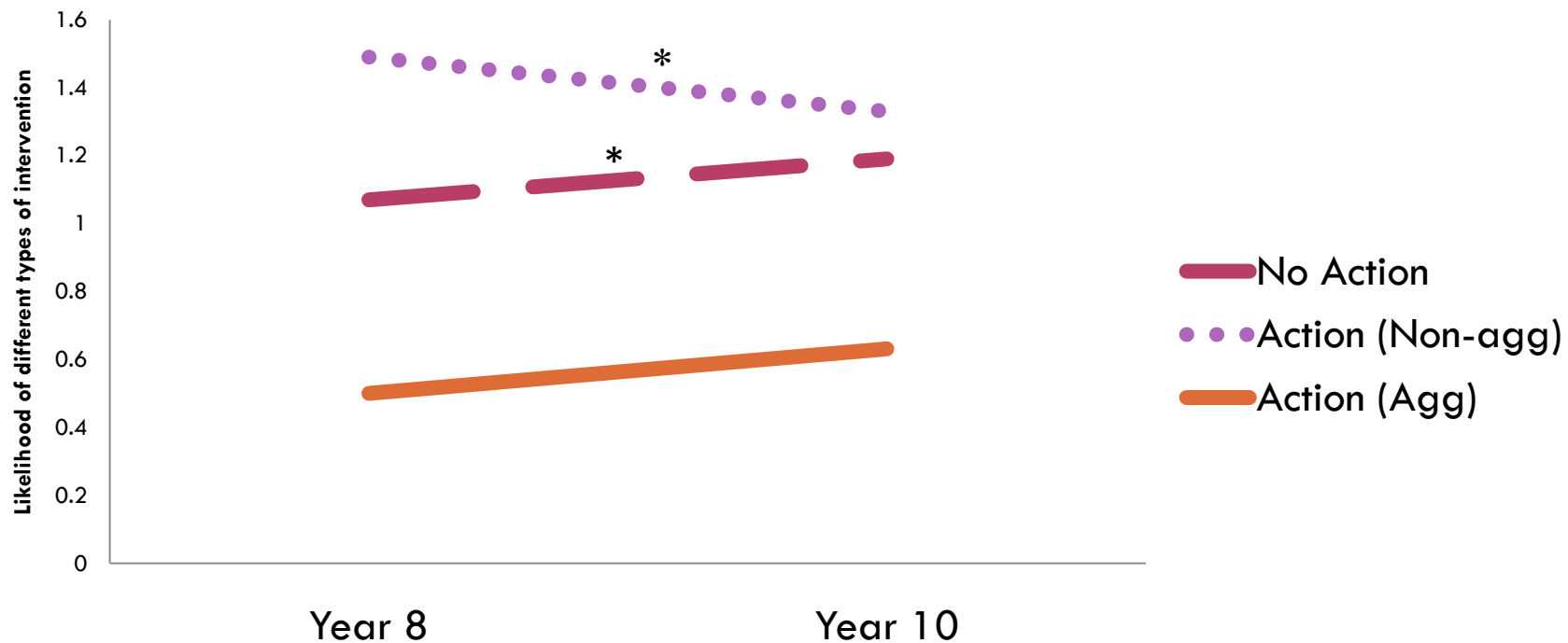
**Interaction between participant's experience of racism and type of intervention**



# Result 3

- Verbal scenario: type of intervention and year group:  $F(2, 854) = 10.083, p=.023$ .

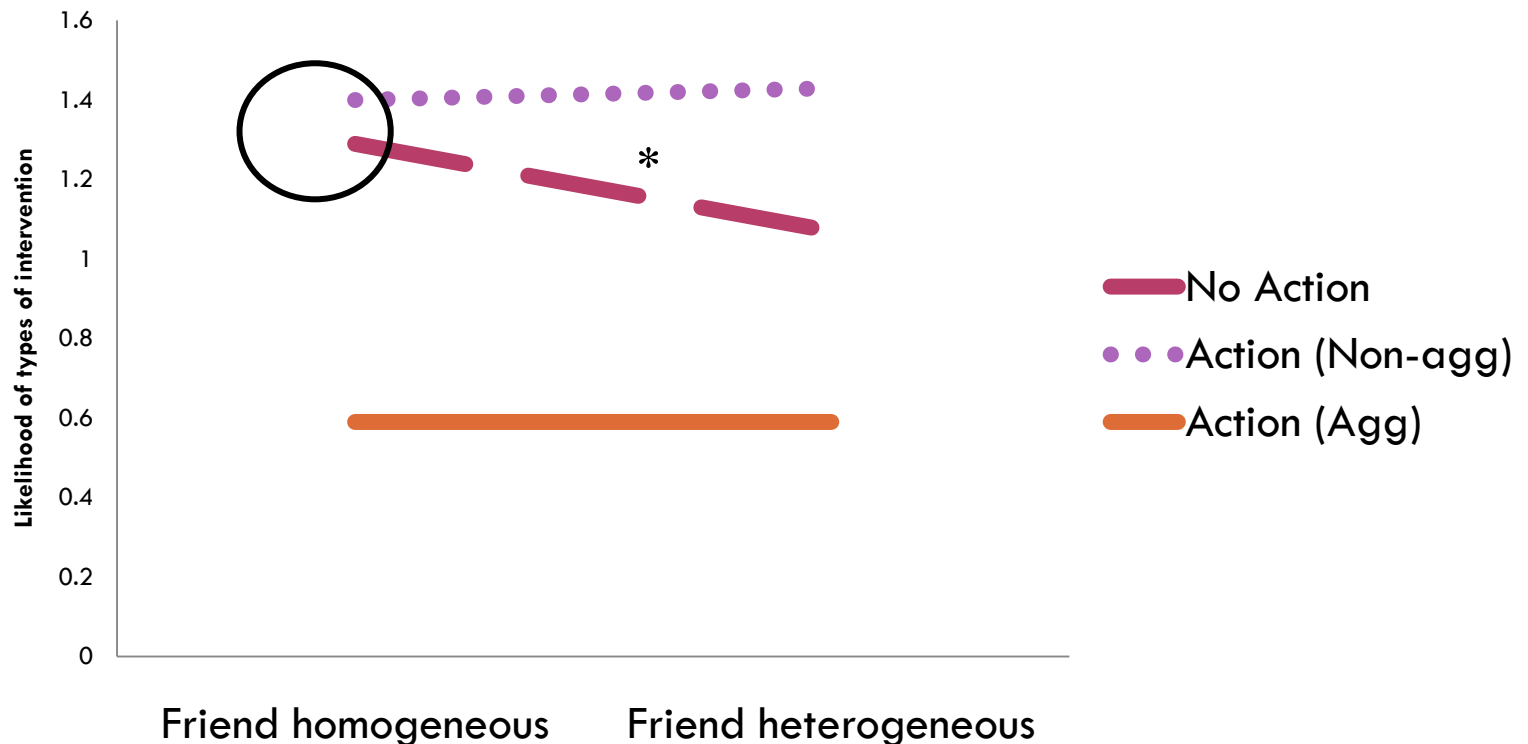
**Interaction between participant's year group and type of intervention**



## Result 4

- Verbal scenario: friends and type of intervention:  $F(2, 944) = 6.659, p = .001$

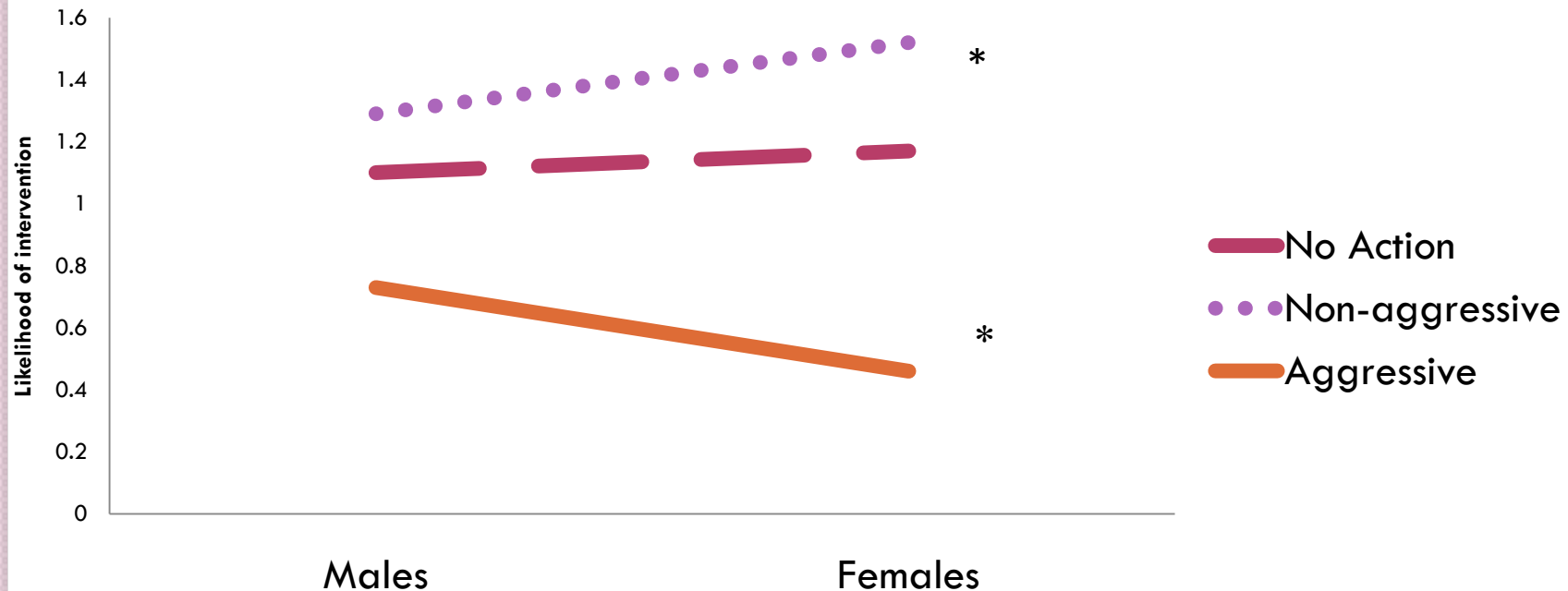
**Interaction between ethnic make up of friendship groups and the type of intervention**



# Result 5

- Verbal scenario: Gender and type of intervention interaction:  $F(2, 1054) = 31.476, p < .001$ .

**Interaction between gender of the participant and the type of intervention**



# Summary of findings



- Year 10s more likely to take no action [no exp]
- Experienced racism, say they'd react aggressively
- (Verbal) Year group interaction with type of intervention, year 10s less non-aggressive and more aggressive action
- Those with more homogeneous friends report more 'No Action' (ignore)
- Males report more aggressive action, females more non-aggressive



# What's next?

- Further analysis on Study 1 and Study 2 data
- Address limitations such as translating intention into action...
- Further investigating factors that contribute to the profile of an 'Assertive Bystander'



# Thank you for listening!

Feedback and comments gratefully  
received...

[s.b.palmer@kent.ac.uk](mailto:s.b.palmer@kent.ac.uk)