Background

  Today's culture is one of progress. One area of progress is the push towards equality, and diversity. It has become a cultural value to be accepting, and supportive of other groups of people, especially minorities. Despite this widespread value, discrimination and prejudice continue to be a problem. An example of this is actor Mel Gibson, who was quoted saying, "Jews are responsible for all the wars in the world" prior to his arrest for a DUI in 2006 (Lists, n.d.). He has also been caught making racist remarks towards people who are Hispanic, and Black (Lists, n.d.). This is just one example of intolerant behavior and comments that have gone unchecked. There are many accounts in which people have engaged in biased behavior without consequence. However, this is not always the case. One common response to expressions of prejudice is to "call-out" the biased behavior or statement. The goal of the proposed research is to understand the effectiveness of call-out culture, in expressions of implicit bias, such as behavior and self-reflection, such as stopping and thinking about one's actions.

  Fueled by the rise of social media use in today's culture, being called-out happens on social media platforms, such as Twitter, but it can also happen in person, while in a public place. The basic premise is that when someone says something, or posts something that is controversial, for example something that is racist, or homophobic, anyone viewing the post has the right, and some may say duty, to call that person out for their unfair views. An example would be if I posted the statement: "Gay people have no right to marry", and a stranger, or even a close friend responded to the post with: "That statement is homophobic, and it is not your place to decide who has the right to marry or not". In this example, I have been called out for my post, in a public place where anyone can see. In addition, one may be called out for something in their past. One example of this is comedian Shane Gills. He was hired as one of the cast members at Saturday Night Live, but was fired before ever appearing on the show. This was due to comments that he had made earlier in his career that were racist. Saturday Night Live stated that they "want SNL to have a variety of voices and points of view within the show" (Romo, 2019). Shane Gills did not meet their standard, and because of racist comments in his past, he lost a job that was very important for his career (Romo, 2019). This example shows that there are real consequences of call-out culture, but it is not yet known how a bystander is affected, or if someone like Shawn Gills will change their behavior in future similar scenarios. Call-out culture exists in places where it is encouraged to call people out on their biases, as a way to reduce bias, and to bring justice to minority groups who may not have a strong voice. Social media is a common environment in which call-out culture thrives.

  This new form of confrontation via social media platforms has become quite controversial. Some argue that it is a way of bringing attention to marginalized groups, and holding people accountable, by showing them that what they said, or did was wrong (Williams & Houts, 2019). In addition, some say that bringing to light wrongs in this world, leads to social justice action, and even the making of certain laws (Williams & Houts, 2019). There are also people who argue that call-out culture is not only unhelpful but can also be detrimental to social growth and justice. The way people are called out can be vicious, and is not an effective way of communicating, or handling conflicts (Ross, 2019). Often the ways that people are confronted are harsh. For example, someone may respond to a racist comment by cursing the commenter out, insulting their character, and generally offending or shaming them. Due to the anonymity of online forums, there is very little accountability for the confronter, while the confronted is being

exposed in a very public way. Therefore, people argue that the goal of bringing awareness to an issue and changing someone's beliefs and behaviors is lost behind the shame and anger that the confronted person feels (Ross, 2019).

Research on confrontation of prejudice sheds light on the effects of call-out culture. One study examined how the hostility of a confrontation impacts its effectiveness. (Czopp, Monteith & Mark, 2006). Participants were randomly assigned to read about a confrontation of bias that was high hostility level (condition 1), moderate hostility level (condition 2), or low hostility level (condition 3). It was found that regardless of the level of hostility, the person being called out still was less likely to have a biased response in the future (Czopp, Monteith & Mark, 2006). However, higher levels of hostility did lead the participant to have negative feelings towards the confronter. This means that there may, in fact, be some good that comes out of confrontation, even if the confronter is harsh.

One theory, proposed by Monteith and Mark (2005), suggests that being confronted makes people aware of discrepancies between their values and behavior. In other words, one may think they are not biased, but after taking a questionnaire, and being told that they actually engage in prejudiced behaviors, they realize that there is a difference between their ideals, for example, being fair and egalitarian, and their subconscious beliefs, and/or actions. Once this realization takes place, they can develop cues for control (Monteith & Mark, 2005). Cues for control are stimuli which cause participants to pause and reflect on their behavior in order to avoid engaging in biased behavior in the future. Signs that cues for control are being formed are the experience of guilt, engagement in retrospective reflection or thinking about one's biased behavior after being made aware of it, and behavioral inhibition. Once cues for control in a certain situation have been established, they will be maintained in future similar situations, and behavioral inhibition will happen (Monteith, Ashburn-Nardo, Voils, & Czopp, 2002). This work showed that when people are confronted, they develop cues for control which have the capability of leading to behavioral inhibition. However, the study was not done in the context of social media. In the study, the confrontation was done in a private setting, where no one is witnessing the confrontation, as opposed to online, which is open to the world. Call-out culture thrives in the environment of social media, and it will therefore be important to understand the effects of being called-out in this specific context. Similar research has suggested that confrontation works in a similar way for different forms of bias, including the confrontation of race and gender bias. (Parker, Monteith, Moss-Racusin & Van, 2018) As seen in the above studies, there has been research done on how call-out culture affects the person who has been called out. But what about people who witness this event? This study aims to answer that question.

Intellectual Merit: The purpose of this study is to determine what effects witnessing an online confrontation has on an individual. The proposed study will explore the effectiveness of call-out culture and will help to provide clarity on the issue of whether call-out culture is helpful or detrimental in changing the behavior of observers of online confrontations. The focus is specifically on how witnessing an event in which someone has been called out affects the bystander. While there have been a number of studies on the way being called out affects the person being called out, there has been very little attention to how a bystander is affected. In addition, there has been very little research on call-out culture through social media specifically.

This study will expand our understanding of confrontation by addressing these two limitations to the current literature.

Proposed Study

The participants will be 200 undergraduate students at Plymouth State University. To fully participate in the study, and provide a real behavioral outcome, participants will be given a compensation of three dollars each, and one dollar to donate to a charity of their choice. The study will last no more than 30 minutes.

This study aims to answer some questions about call-out culture, and the way a bystander is affected by witnessing someone being called out. Participants will be randomly assigned to one of two conditions, one in which a participant will witness someone being called out, and the other in which no one has been called out. Participants will be assigned to either group randomly. Next, the steps that are required for cues for control to develop will be measured, along with behavior. These steps include the establishment of behavioral inhibition, the experience of guilt, and retrospective reflection. A requirement for cues for control is that there be a discrepancy between values and implicit bias. Therefore, people must have values that would be discrepant with the behavior witnessed in order for cues for control to develop. One such value is egalitarianism. Egalitarianism will be measured using the internal/external motivation control prejudice scale. (Plant, & Devine, 1998)

Once participants have consented to participate in the study, they will be instructed to view a social media platform in which someone has been called out for expressing anti-LGBTQ+ bias or not. They will then complete a series of questionnaires assessing their awareness of their own biases, their negative self-directed affect, and their motivation to be egalitarian. To conclude, they will be given a dollar, which they can donate to a group of their choice. One group will be the PSU Pride club, and the other will be a club that is not related to this study. Participants will decide whether they would like to split the dollar evenly between each club, split it in different amounts for each club, or give the entire dollar to one of the clubs. Our measure of behavior will be the amount of money given to PSU Pride compared to the amount of money given to the PSU group unaffiliated with the LGBTQ+ community.

I propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Overall, people who witness call-out culture in action will behave in a less biased way in the future, (donate money more evenly across the two groups), and will demonstrate more evidence of developing cues for control.

Hypothesis 2: These relationships will be stronger for people high in motivation to control prejudice.

Broader Impacts

On a large scale, the information in this study will provide empirical data for the current debate about the pros and cons of call-out culture. If the data show that the hypotheses stated above are true, there will be further information on ways of creating effective interventions, such as implicit bias training. At Plymouth State University, this could be a way to better serve

minority groups. The University's motto is "Ut Prosim", which means "that I may serve". The information collected will help us serve PSU's community, and live up to its motto. Additionally, provided the data show that the hypotheses are supported, there will be evidence that people should be encouraged to call other people out. By doing this, there will be a higher chance for others to witness these confrontations, which will lead to greater self-awareness, and less biased behavior overall. These interventions may be used at Plymouth State University, as well as in the broader community, and, if effective, may work to make society more fair. This research will help take steps to make the world a safer place for marginalized groups, as it will help us determine whether one route to more egalitarian behavior is an effective one or not.

Specific Responsibilities

In execution of this grant, I will help develop the measures and manipulations for this study, design the experiment, write and submit the IRB application, run individual research participants through the study, manage and analyze the data collected, and write up a research paper that summarizes the study and my findings. I will also present my findings to the Plymouth State University community.

What I Hope to Gain

This opportunity is important for my future, as it will help me decide on my career path. I am considering a career in experimental psychology, and given the commitment of such a career, I am seeking experience in actually conducting experimental research outside of the classroom. In addition, this experience will increase my chances of getting into graduate school. Through this research I hope to have a greater understanding of what it means to conduct a study. I hope to gain experience designing, conducting, and interpreting research, and to develop my skills in performing research, and designing a study. In addition, I hope to gain skills in presenting, as well as discussing psychological research with others through presenting my work to the Plymouth State University community.

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