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"They Can Fight Their Own Fights": Prejudice, Permissiveness, and Discrimination against Minorities*

Laura Novaes Andrade[1,**], Cláudio Vaz Torres[1], & Saba Safdar[2]

[1]*Universidade de Brasília, Brasília, DF, Brasil*

[2]*Universidade de Guelph, Ontário, Canadá*

ABSTRACT – The tendency to be permissive in face of a discriminatory situation is called collusion. The present study aimed to define and characterize collusion, and identify the variables connected to it, considering the perspective of different identity groups. Participants were 31 individuals divided in seven focus groups. The analysis indicated four categories connected to collusion: a) Close Relations: valuable interactions through which individuals learn behavioral patterns that lead to permissiveness; b) Group Identity: social identities, and intergroup relations patterns; c) Situation: characteristics of the situation in which discrimination is observed; and d) Cost-Effective Balance: perception the individuals have regarding the impact of their actions on the context and the cost attached to it.

KEYWORDS: prejudice, discrimination, permissiveness, collusion

"Ele Luta pela Causa Dele": Preconceito, Permissividade e Discriminação contra Grupos Minoritários

RESUMO – A tendência das pessoas de serem permissivas diante de uma situação discriminatória é chamada colusão. O presente estudo teve como objetivo definir e caracterizar colusão e identificar as variáveis a ela associadas, a partir da perspectiva de diferentes grupos identitários. Os participantes foram 31 sujeitos divididos em sete grupos focais. A análise indicou quatro categorias ligadas à colusão: a) Relações Próximas: interações por meio das quais os indivíduos aprendem padrões de comportamento que levam à permissividade; b) Identidade Grupal: identidades sociais e padrões de relações intergrupais; c) Situação: características da situação em que se observa discriminação; e d) Relação Custo-benefício: percepção que os indivíduos têm sobre o impacto de suas ações no contexto e o custo que lhes está associado.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: preconceito, discriminação, permissividade, colusão

Over the years, many researchers have tried to explain how prejudice and discrimination work. Prejudice is defined as a negative attitude towards an identifiable group based exclusively on this group membership (Allport, 1954). As an attitude, prejudice is an individual evaluation of a social object, and it represents an inherent process of human cognition (Turner et al., 1987) and a pathway for the formation of identity (Tajfel, 1978).

As societies have taken concrete actions to be more inclusive, expression of prejudice has become more subtle (Crosby et al., 1980), ambivalent (Katz & Hass, 1988), modern (Mcconahay et al., 1981), aversive (Pearson et al., 2009), and benevolent (Glick & Fiske, 2012). Over time prejudice has proven to be more than an individual attitude, but a part of a cultural and historical background (Allport, 1954; Freire, 2018), founding a systematically oppressive society (David & Derthick, 2018; Freire, 2018; Jetten & Peters, 2019).

This systemic oppression is based on the power relation established between social groups over time (David & Derthick, 2018; Freire, 2018). Moreover, oppression is associated with social norms (Cialdini, 2007) that indicate

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** E-mail: lauranovaesa@gmail.com

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how to interact with ingroup and outgroup members (Smith et al., 2015). The usage and reinforcement of those norms throughout history can lead to a legal validation of prejudiced beliefs and discriminatory behaviors (e.g., racial segregation; criminalization of homosexuality; prohibition of female work and suffrage). In this sense, the oppression system encourages, expects, and regulates discriminatory behaviors through the normalization of prejudice and discrimination in intergroup relations (David & Derthick, 2018; Noelle-Neumann, 1974; Pereira & Vala, 2007, Smith et al., 2015). Both the objective and subjective aspects of social norms turn prejudice and discrimination into part of a culture's institutions (Triandis, 2002), and imposes institutionalized oppression by force and deprivation (e.g., division of labor in society, limited social mobility, legal restrictions to access social resources, the glass ceiling phenomenon) (David & Derthick, 2018; Torino et al., 2019).

Once oppression is established, the system keeps reproducing itself through the socialization of its newcomers (Freire, 2018). Socialization describes the process wherein individuals learn the social expectations for the different social identities and how they should interact with others (Laible et al., 2015). This is the key to transfer systemic oppression through generations: oppressor and oppressed groups are socialized to play their roles and to ensure the continuity of social oppression (Freire, 2018; Major & O'Brien, 2005), in a way that the prejudiced environment continues to shape prejudiced people (Allport, 1954; David & Derthick, 2018). With the condition of oppression fully established, individual displays of blatant prejudice are no longer needed, and the system maintains social oppression as part of its daily life.

One of the contributing factors for continuity of prejudice and systemic oppression in society is that people who may not hold prejudiced beliefs tend to be reluctant to speak up against prejudice (Sue et al., 2019). In a situation where the individual observes a discriminatory behavior, one may: a) endorse the prejudice, approve and reproduce it; b) veto it, and openly confront the behavior; or c) remain neutral without actively validating or rejecting the discrimination. The latter has been previously described in the literature as discrimination by omission (Braun, 2000). Omission is usually perceived as less problematic since it does not involve a deliberate action from the individual (Ritov & Baron, 1992; Spranca et al., 1991). Still, the omission bias plays an important part in the maintenance of oppression systems (Doyle, 1997) since the only way to change status quo would be challenging it, while the failure to do so allows oppression to persist (Ritov & Baron, 1992, Sue et al., 2019).

Even though this is an important topic to understand the dynamics of intergroup relations, prejudice by omission has been neglected by social psychological research (Braun, 2000; Riggs & Choi, 2006). This paper focus on a specific form of omission: collusion – the cooperation with the dominant group, consciously or not, to reinforce that group's stereotypical attitudes, behaviors, and norms of dominance. The concept of collusion is described to evidence not only the exemption of liability of the bystanders (Latané & Rodin, 1969) in a discriminatory situation, but also their connivance with the oppression system and the important role they play in its maintenance.

The word collusion expresses an agreement between parties to harm others. For the study of prejudice, the concept refers to being conniving, becoming complicit, being permissive. It is suggested there are three types of collusion: a) silence - when the person perceives discriminatory behavior but does not acknowledge it publicly; b) denial - when the person refuses to acknowledge a behavior as discriminatory, denying its occurrence; and c) compliance and agreement - when the person is permissive towards discrimination, acknowledging its occurrence although not actively perpetuating it (Cross, 2000). Collusion, in all its forms, can be observed in both implicit and blatant prejudice expressions – whenever the observer understands the situation as prejudicial, even if it is very subtle, the active choice of not interfering is a form of collusion.

One of the reasons that lead people to collude is self-protection. When the individuals find themselves in a hostile environment where the norm provides for and facilitates discrimination against certain groups (Pereira & Vala, 2007), it is reasonable for them to collude (Krane & Waldron, 2020; Noelle-Neumann, 1974). Additionally, collusion is connected to group acceptance, and social status maintenance (Cross, 2000; Doyle, 1997).

Although collusion might be easily observed in daily life, it has been overlooked by academia over the years. Previous research has addressed other phenomena related to omission (i.e., Anderson, 2003; Fryberg & Eason, 2017; Gearhart & Zhang, 2013) and confrontation (i.e., Sue et al., 2019; Thomas et al., 2020). To this point, the (lack of) reaction in face of discrimination seems to be related to variables such as the sense of belonging to the targeted group (Wang & Dovidio, 2016), the situation in which discrimination occurs (Vaccarino & Kawakami, 2020), the relationship with the aggressor (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2014), the perceived impact of confrontation (Rattan & Dweck, 2010), and the social (Good et al., 2012; Nicole & Stewart, 2004) and personal (Rasinski et al., 2013) costs of confronting. To date, the term collusion is an ill-defined concept associated with those variables, and sound academic efforts were not found to delimit the phenomenon, its implications, and situations of occurrence. Considering this, we conducted an exploratory study to delimit and characterize the concept of collusion and to identify facilitating and inhibiting variables related to it considering the perspective of people from different social identity groups. In this paper, we focus specifically on gender, race, and sexual orientation identities.

We chose a qualitative approach as a way to define and expand the focus of interest in the study, and to assess social variables that can help the interpretation of the social

phenomenon under analysis from the perspective of the individuals who actually experience it and not from the exclusive perspective of the researchers (Godoy, 1995). We used a focus group technique as a way to further the discussion on underexplored topics. In this research, the groups will be treated as exploratory groups aiming to produce content, generate hypotheses and models to be investigated (Gondim, 2003). With this method, we expect to come up with an initial definition for collusion proposed by a collective of individuals who experience the phenomenon.

METHOD

Participants

Thirty-one people participated in this study: 17 men,13 women and one non-binary individual, with an average age of 24.58 years (SD = 7.09 years), 29% of the sample had an undergraduate degree. Participants were assigned to one of the seven pre-defined groups according to self-identification provided by them – two groups to discuss Racism (Black/White), two groups to discuss Sexism (Men/Women), and three groups to discuss Homophobia (Homosexual Men/Homosexual Women/Heterosexuals).

Instruments

A semi-structured interview script was used to present the discussion to the participants and direct the main points. All sessions were recorded in audio after consent statements of all participants was obtained.

Procedures

Focus groups were used as a data collection technique to stimulate the dialogue between participants, promoting a more fruitful and socially engaged debate than would be possible in individual approaches (Backes et al., 2011). Participants were recruited on the internet with the help of social media and interviewed during their preferred time. The sessions lasted an average of 86 minutes (ranging from 76 to 109 minutes), starting with an explanation about the study and questions about the individuals' experience in relation to the investigated phenomenon. At the end of each interview, each group provided summary definitions for collusion and its related variables.

All procedures in the study were performed in accordance with the ethical standards of the American Psychological Association, and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all individual adult participants included in the study.

Data Analysis

Recorded data was transcribed and submitted to a Descending Hierarchical Classification (DHC) performed in IRAMuTeQ (*Interface de R pour les Analyses Multidimensionnelles de Textes et de Questionnaires*) (Ratinaud, 2009). The software was programmed to consider adjectives, verbs and nouns identified in the transcriptions, and the DHC indicated the main classes present in the speech considering the patterns inherent to the corpus submitted (Camargo & Justo, 2013). Then, content analysis of the categories presented was performed so to name and describe the content of each one.

RESULTS

From the 72,956 word occurrences, the software analyzed 3,175 lemmatized active forms (nouns, verbs, and adjectives) and identified 2,064 text segments. Using IRAMuTeq, there were 1,834 text segments classified in two categories and four sub-categories named according to the content presented by each of them (Figure 1).

The first category, Early Socialization, describes the behavioral patterns learned by the individuals as they become part of the community. Early Socialization includes the sub-category of Close Relations (22.4% of the classified segments) related to valuable interaction through which individuals learn behavioral patterns that might endorse prejudiced and/or permissive attitudes. Included in this category, there are other speeches that present family, friends, work, church, and school as contexts in which prejudice and the social norms of discrimination were perpetuated over time. Further, participants also discussed the challenges in defying those beliefs.

Speech 1: Usually my father, my brother, my mother, they get angry if I say anything about sexism to them. They say "No, it's not sexism. Society is like that; you think you know too much.". I think it makes it difficult for you to speak up, especially with extended family members, when it is even more difficult, because you are not so close to the person to confront them, but even with friends I still can't speak up.

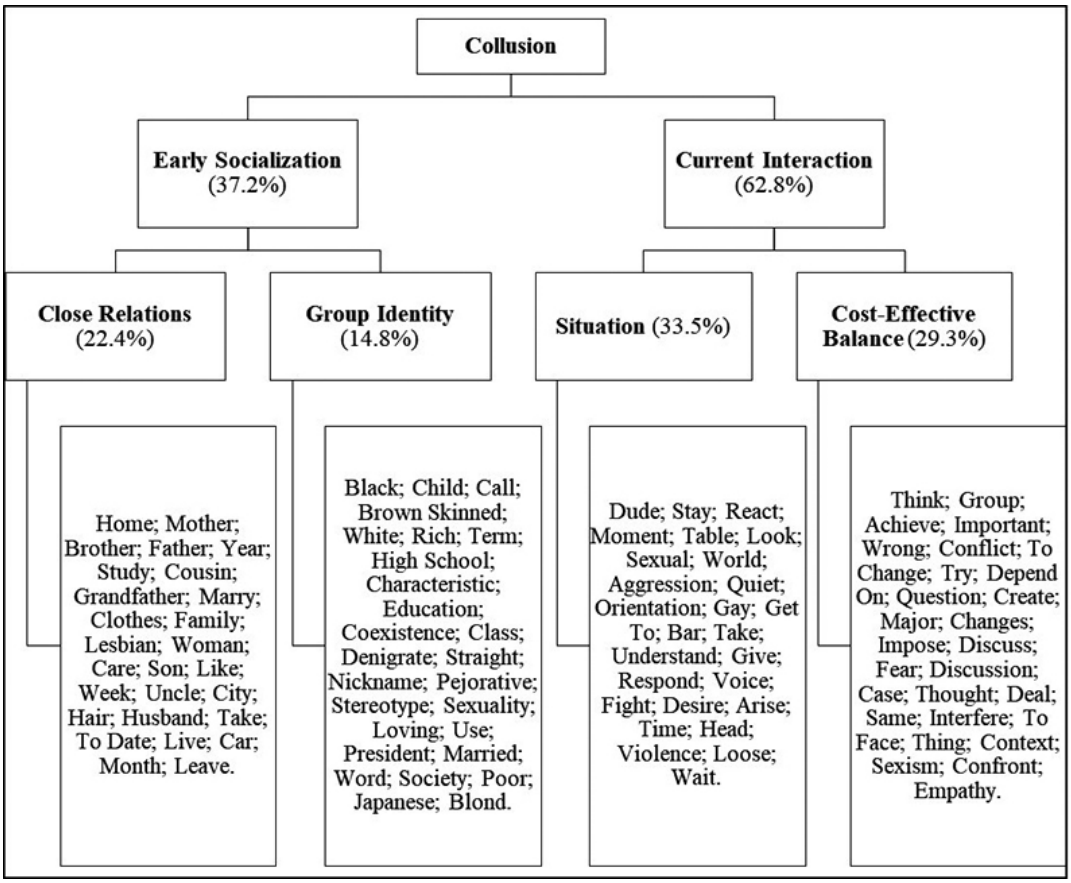

Figure 1. Descending Hierarchical Classification
Note. The words presented in the graph were classified by IRAMuTeQ considering the chi-square test results.

The text classified in this category represent participants' interaction with other people in important contexts of their lives. Table 1 presents the text segments that scored higher relative chi-squared values (p<0.05) in the category.

In addition to Close Relations, Early Socialization also includes Group Identity as a sub-category (14.8% of the classified segments), which describes the social identities, how they are perceived in society, and how they should interact with others. The data evidence how a group membership can determine the experiences a person will or will not have in life, highlighting the expectations and limitations imposed onto different identities and the perpetuation of stereotypes.

Speech 2: I always had many female friends and I used to play with dolls at their house when I was a child. The problem is that people impose sexuality on everything. […] Everything is sexualized, "Wow, look, he's a homosexual, look how he touches that child", "Wow, but he's a homosexual", so it always comes first, you are never seen as a person. And then, finally, there are all the other stereotypes that come up and it all comes up when you are a child, and you don't really understand what sexuality is. Sometimes you don't even understand what you are. And then at school, you can't play, so I had to hide, because I was afraid of people retaliating.

Moreover, participants discussed the expected interaction between social groups and how social hierarchy plays a role between them, including privilege and power relations established.

Speech 3: My mother was a single woman, with a son, in a new city, without a home. We lived there by ourselves and I went to a private school. So, I wasn't one of the rich kids in school, right? So, what happened is I suffered several systematic harassments, mainly for being an effeminate child too. So, for example, once physical education class was in a courtyard outside school, and then the boys got together, threw me on the floor, spit in my face, cursed me, cursed me, cursed me and said that I belonged in the floor, blablabla, and the whole story. The school knew, the teacher knew, everyone knew. My mother knew and nobody did anything. Nothing. [...] And then it was minimized and silenced. The school principal knew, the other teachers knew that this was happening systematically. The girls at school forced me to tie their shoelaces, and because of my sexuality, people would call me 'faggot', 'gay'... There was also a classist thing, because my mother was not from the richest families in town and people who were bullying me were the sons of the owner of I-don't-know-what in the city.

Table 1
Typical Text Segments in the Close Relationships Sub-Category

	Group	χ^2	Text Segment	Comprehensive Speech
CR1	Heterosexuals	173.6	It's always like that: when they're together it's okay, they interact normally, but when we get home, they [the parents] laugh and comment about it [homosexual people].	–
CR2	Homosexual Men	173.6	You're at the organization and then the other person comes and says something [homophobic] and then you copiously cry. You go home and you cry, cry, cry.	–
CR3	Homosexual Women	134.6	It seems unbelievable. Note that my mother is 57 years old. I still think she thinks about it (homophobia), she sees it. But when it happens in their house, it seems that the parents get defensive. I don't know what's that reaction about.	[I perform femininity] more than my so-called butch friends […], but I think that even today my mother still thinks that at any time I will want to become a man, something like that, and 'will it be this week? This month?'. And every time we have an uncomfortable talk… like during the elections, I couldn't handle my super conservative father, so I would talk to my mom about it, because we are closer and we have a good relationship, and she would reply 'oh, so you want to become a man now?'. It seems unbelievable. Note that my mother is 57 years old. I still think she thinks about it (homophobia), she sees it. But when it happens in their house, it seems that the parents get defensive. I don't know what's that reaction about.

Note. Comprehensive speech is presented when the Text Segment is surrounded by other segments that belong to the same sub-category and add meaning to the speech.

Table 2 presents the text segments that scored higher relative chi-squared values (p<0.05) in the category.

The second category, Current Interaction, refers to immediate aspects of the interaction that influence collusion behavior. This category describes what the individuals consider when deciding if they will confront the discriminatory behavior or not. The first sub-category is Situation (33.5% of the classified segments), which relates to characteristics of the situation that shape the individuals behavior, such as the kind of behavior observed, the people involved (both aggressor and victim), and the potential consequences of the action.

Speech 4: I've thought about this, like, what am I willing to do? And then the first thing I always think is "Is it about me?", if it is, then like, okay, then that's a different decision. But if it is about someone else, it's like, immediate… like I can never [let it go]. Those who know me know that when I see a problem I want to go there and solve it. I am like this, but this is a selection of course, it will depend on where I am. I always scan the environment... oh, I'm in a bar that is mostly Straight Men, am I going to start a fight? Or I'll just say, 'excuse me…'. Like, how am I going to start this fight? It will be much more about how I am going to start this fight than if I am going to or not, you know? And then, for example, at home I made this decision, it is like, "I want to be ok with my family" and being ok with my family means being in the closet for them, specially being in the closet in some situations, so like... these [prejudiced] jokes, these things, I just say, 'Ok... let's stop that', at most, or else I just give up and leave the room.

The text segments highlighted in this category describe what the expectations are towards prejudice and discrimination in different social contexts. Table 3 presents the text segments that scored higher relative chi-squared values (p<0.05) in the category.

Finally, the last sub-category of Current Interaction is Cost-Effective Balance (29.3% of the classified segments), referring to the perception the individuals have that they can positively impact the context through confrontation with minimum personal cost attached. The Cost-Effective Balance is analyzed in terms of the resources the person must invest to fight the observed discrimination and how likely they think they are to succeed.

Speech 5: There is a lot of wear and tear when we try to discuss it with family, or even in other contexts, for example, in the church. And it is awful when you try to speak up but fail. There is a lot of resistance and it will wear you down over time, because you are the only one who is looking for change, but everyone is against you. The strength that the group has is much stronger than you, so this generates a great mental and emotional strain for each one of us.

The text segments evidence participants' uncertainty about the impact they would have acting against discrimination. Table 4 presents the text segments that scored higher relative chi-squared values (p<0.05) in the category.

Table 2
Typical Text Segments in the Group Identity Sub-Category

	Group	χ^2	Text Segment	Comprehensive Speech
GI1	White People	242.1	I've been trying to cut out 'oh, it's the black guy' [from my vocabulary]. No, use his name.	I'm starting to try this change of attitude, to call people who eventually had a different nickname by their names. For example, my friend Café, his wife calls him by his name. At work, we use his last name. But among friends, we call him Café, that's problematic. It's the same thing with words like 'denigrating'. This was a wake-up call for me. Calling someone 'the Black guy' is something I don't do anymore. I've been trying to cut out 'oh, it's the Black guy' [from my vocabulary]. No, use his name.
GI2	White People	132.6	But the normal joke… well, not normal, but…. The person can feel… you may think it's normal but the person may not. Saying like 'hey, Black guy' something like that, if you are not close to the person, they can feel uncomfortable.	–
GI3	White People	130	And it's funny I never realized, I never wondered about my uncles and cousins being Black. I never distinguished my uncles and cousins who are naturally miscegenated, some are darker than others.	–

Note. Comprehensive speech is presented when the Text Segment is surrounded by other segments that belong to the same sub-category and add meaning to the speech.

Table 3
Typical Text Segments in the Situation Sub-Category

	Group	χ^2	Text Segment	Comprehensive Speech
S1	Homosexual Women	73.7	Even at the University we see some micro-aggressions that I get like… come on, people!	Even at the University we see some micro-aggressions that I get like… come on, people! Everyone is there, and the place is a den of diversity and I don't know if people simply don't open their eyes to it. It goes so unnoticed and they don't open their eyes.
S2	Women	55.18	I left the subway and the guy followed me. I was terrified. I was like: and now, what do I do?	This guy was following me. The policeman went there, stopped him and explained that that wagon was women-only. I explained to the policeman what had happened, and I had already sent a message to security. And then he asked me 'did he touch you?', and I said no, so he turned to the guy and told the him to go to the back wagon and told me 'now everything is fine!'. But, like, he didn't touch me because I didn't let him, because I ran away. But that's the point: 'oh, if he didn't touch you, then it's not harassment'.
S3	Homosexual Men	54.7	Because like [they will say] 'this guy is obnoxious' or 'no, he was quiet because he is good enough not to talk about it'	Because like [they will say] 'this guy is obnoxious' or 'no, he was quiet because he is good enough not to talk about it'. And this, within the community, is reflected in the way the more masculine muscular gays are like 'the effeminate [gays] talk too much, they show it [homosexuality] too much, they don't need to talk so much [about it], not everyone is like them'.

Note. Comprehensive speech is presented when the Text Segment is surrounded by other segments that belong to the same sub-category and add meaning to the speech.

Table 4
Typical Text Segments in the Cost-Effective Balance Sub-Category

	Group	χ^2	Text Segment	Comprehensive Speech
CEB1	Homosexual Men	114.9	Maybe people would confront more, maybe not. I'm very suspicious about it. Maybe I read too much about dialectical materialism.	Maybe people would confront more, maybe not. I'm very suspicious about it. Maybe I read too much about dialectical materialism. I don't think there's anything we can do. If it [homophobia] stops, something else will come up because if life doesn't have fights, it doesn't flow. […] I think violence against the social minorities will never stop.
CEB2	Black People	72.75	I think it's an ethical matter, I don't know if it would be possible to do it, to make people go through [discriminatory] experiences.	When it is discussed it causes discomfort, but that discomfort is temporary, so the person discusses that topic, but continues in that inertia: they hear it now but they will continue practicing it [discrimination]. I think it's an ethical matter, I don't know if it would be possible to do it, to make people go through [discriminatory] experiences that these people (minorities) go through. It is easier to be empathetic when you feel what other people feel.
CEB3	White People	64.58	And every time it [disparaging jokes] has happened specifically in that group, he was the one who said it. Nobody else would say it. And sometimes I feel there's a discomfort when he says it, because nobody laughs either, maybe only someone here and there	I was thinking of some Whatsapp groups and one of them is from the church, and a colleague who is Black keeps sharing memes about Black people. He does it himself, and I don't know if it's a defense thing. […] And every time it has happened specifically in that group, he was the one who shared it. Nobody else would. And sometimes I feel there's a discomfort when he does it, because nobody laughs either, maybe only someone here and there. There's no way you can react to that, maybe he talks like that among friends because maybe he wants to protect himself by doing it.

Note. Comprehensive speech is presented when the Text Segment is surrounded by other segments that belong to the same sub-category and add meaning to the speech.

DISCUSSION

The data presented indicate that collusion is a socially experienced phenomenon and recognized by different identities. The findings in this study indicate that all groups interviewed perceive collusion as a similar phenomenon, regardless the kind of discrimination observed. In general, participants reported difficulty in speaking up, since the perpetrator of discrimination justify their behavior based on historical tradition, unintentionality, humor, religious beliefs etc.

The analysis indicates two main categories, which were named Early Socialization and Current Interaction. The first, Early Socialization, describes the learning process through which the individuals understand the expectations for the different social identities and how they should interact (Laible et al., 2015), especially when talking about stigmatized identities (Major & O'Brien, 2005). Therefore, collusion is constituted as a consequence of social tradition (Freire, 2018) through which oppressive behaviors are culturally authorized (Allport, 1954) and do not need to be stopped. Permissiveness towards discrimination is then related to conformity to this tradition (Noelle-Neumann, 1974; Stangor, 2016).

The Early Socialization variable was hence named because it reflects the oppressive patterns transferred through generations (Freire, 2018) The socialization process is represented in the analysis by the categories Close Relations (CR), described mainly by family-related terms (i.e., Mother, Brother, Father, Cousin, Grandfather) and Group Identity (GI), which includes terms used to describe social groups (i.e., Black, Child, White; Rich, Straight). Specifically, CR describes the influence of valuable relationships throughout a person's life. It is through this intimate contact with ingroup members that the individual learns what it means to be one of them, and what it means to be different (Sim et al., 2014; Tajfel, 1978).

The main CR text segments describe the family's public acceptance of minority identities accompanied by an intimate rejection of those same identities overt by the private sharing of prejudiced jokes (CR1) and the deliberate refusal to acknowledge a minority identity in the family (CR3). Additionally, CR2 included organizational contexts as a hostile environment to minority identities and its emotional impact on the individual. Those text segments point to the presence and

reinforcement of prejudiced beliefs in the participants inner circles, pervading their socialization (Freire, 2018; Liable et al., 2015). It is through that socialization that individuals are presented to prejudice supportive social norms (Smith et al., 2015), and learn to behave accordingly (David & Derthick, 2018; Pereira & Vala, 2007). Participants' speeches portray the perception of adequate behavior from the perspective of their ingroup members, and the difficulties fighting that perspective when their identities are not acknowledged, and their arguments are disregarded based on the normalization of prejudice and discrimination (Speech 1: 'It's not sexism. Society is like that').

In a complementary way, the sub-category Group Identity (GI) is related to social groups and its processes of categorization, identification, and comparison (Tajfel, 1978; Jetten & Peters, 2019). Moreover, the content in this sub-category refers to intergroup relations and the stigmatization that emerges from this interaction (Major & O'Brien, 2005), forging stereotyped, deprived, and discriminated identities (Speech 2: 'it always comes first, you are never seen as a person').

The top two GI text segments reaffirm the discrimination as normative and normalized in daily life. Prejudice comes up as an integrative part of subjective culture, symbolically pervading language to communicate the values and beliefs shared in the group (GI1: 'But among friends, we call him Café[1], that's problematic. It's the same thing with words like "denigrating".'). In this process of cultural transmission, the choice of words and the meanings attributed to them are not random or naive and demonstrate values, attitudes, beliefs, and norms shared by the group (Triandis, 2002) (GI1: 'This was a wake-up call for me. Calling someone 'the Black guy' is something I don't do anymore. I've been trying to cut out 'oh, it's the Black guy' [from my vocabulary]. No, use his name.'). Furthermore, it was evidenced that disparaging jokes are seen as natural (G2: 'But the normal joke… well, not normal […] you may think it's normal, but the person may not.') even if the joke's target is explicitly hurt (Thomas et al., 2020).

The text also highlights the difference between non-discriminatory relations (GI3: 'I never wondered about my uncles and cousins being Black. I never distinguished my uncles and cousins who are naturally miscegenated, some are darker than others.') and discriminatory/hierarchical interactions established between groups over time (Speech 5: '[They] said I belonged in the floor'). Participants' contact with minority identities throughout their life allegedly made it easier for them to interact with those identities without adopting discriminatory behaviors, as it has been suggested by the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954).

[1] The word Café (coffee) in Portuguese is frequently used as a nickname for Black people, associating their skin tone to the color of coffee beans. Using that word puts a spotlight on racial identity and all its associated stereotypes.

Together, the first two sub-categories outline the cultural aspect of prejudice (Allport, 1954) evidenced by the social expectancy and tolerance regarding discrimination, and the generalized omission in face of it. All the interviews illustrated moments in which the participants failed or watched someone else fail to confront prejudice (Speech 1: 'I still can't speak up'; Speech 3: 'The school knew, the teacher knew, everyone knew. My mother knew and nobody did anything. Nothing.'). Those previous life experiences with prejudice and discrimination were invoked in over a third of the discourses analyzed (37.2%), tracing part of collusion behavior back to socialization.

Beyond those previously learnt behavioral patterns, participants describe collusion as closely related to the contextual variables (Vaccarino & Kawakami, 2020; Wang & Dovidio, 2016).

The second main category, Current Interaction, refers to the contextual elements evaluated by individuals when observing a discriminatory behavior. The sub-category Situation refers to the setting in which discrimination occurs and the parties involved (Vaccarino & Kawakami, 2020). Participants detailed what aspects of the situation they consider before deciding to confront discrimination (i.e., Speech 4). This 'environment scan' also involves the perception of danger implied in the situation (S2: 'I left the subway and the guy followed me. I was terrified. I was like: and now, what do I do?') and of social support to minority identities (S1: 'the place is a den of diversity'), that informs individuals about the social norms of the specific context they are in, which allows them to evaluate the best behavioral reaction to the social stimuli (Noelle-Neumann, 1974; Pereira & Vala, 2007; Smith et al., 2015). That means different contexts establish specific norms regarding discriminatory behavior (Vaccarino & Kawakami, 2020) - some discrimination might be endorsed while others might be completely rejected (Pereira & Vala, 2007). In the present analysis, text segments S2 and S3 indicate that when a minority groups member colludes, this is perceived as a positive feature of that individual, an expected and praised reaction to discrimination. Participants have stated that collusion is more likely to occur when the group supports prejudice and discrimination in a normative manner - thus, when the individuals realize that they will not have support from the group or even that they may be retaliated for curbing discriminatory behavior (S3: '[they will say] "this guy is obnoxious"'), they tend to collude (Noelle-Neumann, 1974).

While the sub-category Situation describes the analysis of the context in which discrimination is observed, the fourth sub-category, Cost-Effective Balance (CEB), describes how they perceive the cost and the potential outcomes of confronting discrimination (Speech 5: 'There is a lot of wear and tear when we try to discuss it with family, or even in other contexts, for example, in the church. And it is awful when you try to speak up but fail.'). Cost-Effective Balance depicts the concern about the consequences of

confrontational behavior. It seems that the individual may or may not collude depending on how many resources one must invest (Rasinski et al., 2013) in order to achieve (if possible) a positive outcome (Rattan & Dweck, 2010) and how hostile the context can be (Good et al., 2012; Nicole & Stewart, 2004)- that hostility talks not only about the social norms and its strength, but also about the penalties applied to the transgressions (Speech 5: 'everyone is against you. The strength that the group has is much stronger than you, so this generates great mental and emotional strain for each one of us.').

The Cost-Effective Balance perspective introduces the idea that people are not willing to confront discrimination because a potential reaction is seen as a latent threat to themselves (Doyle, 1997; Good et al., 2012; Nicole & Stewart, 2004; Rasinski et al., 2013). Consequences seem to be an important factor for collusion, in the sense that confronting discrimination can be harmful (Eliezer & Major, 2012; Nicole & Stewart, 2004; Noelle-Neumann, 1974), with aftereffects ranging from legal damages, to family and social problems, and psychological distress and physical aggression. This category indicates that people try to find balance between the impact their behavior will have over the context and the potential of change perceived, and the resources they will have to put on to achieve that impact (Good et al., 2012). This understanding fits both majority and minority group approaches in the sense that majority group members will choose to collude because they want to keep their social status and power, while minority group members will collude because they are already disempowered to confront (Doyle, 1997). Either way, majority and minority groups are concerned about self-protection and affiliation (Cross, 2000), even if they have different motivations.

The text segments highlighted in CEB evidence participants' uncertainty about the impact they would have acting against discrimination. Participants pointed out that when the discriminatory behavior is seen as impossible to change, they might end up colluding (Rattan & Dweck, 2010) (CEB1: 'I don't think there's anything we can do.'; CEB2: 'they hear it now, but they will continue practicing it [discrimination]'). Such statements reaffirm the intricate connection between conformity and prejudice maintenance (Allport, 1954; Stangor, 2016). That conformity is essential to support systemic oppression (Freire, 2018) and it is forced upon aggressors, victims, and bystanders in discriminatory situations, as exposed in CEB3.

It is important to notice that the analysis shows that Current Interaction (62.8%) explains a larger portion of collusion behavior. That reinforces the comprehension of collusion as a contextualized phenomenon, connected to present social variables more than to previous experiences. Based on the data collected, collusion can be defined as the exemption of liability when observing a discriminatory situation. This exemption does not derive from misinterpretation of the situation or diffusion of responsibility (Latané & Rodin, 1969), but from compliance with historical-cultural patterns of discrimination (David & Derthick, 2018; Freire, 2018), conformity to group norms (Allport, 1954), lack of empathy for the discriminated group (Doyle, 1997), perception of low self-efficacy to stop discrimination from happening and/or to change the discriminator's mind, and fear of possible consequences (Anderson, 2003). Further, we propose that collusion is a self-protection mechanism (Cross, 2000) that leads individuals not to engage in confrontational behaviors in order to avoid harmful interactions, or to avoid becoming targets of social punishment for breaking historically established rules. Like other omissive behaviors, colluding would be a way to save social, physical and psychological resources and to maintain the observer's integrity – people collude to seek for group acceptance, to maintain social relations and status, and to prevent ostracism (Cross, 2000; Doyle, 1997; Krane & Waldron, 2020; Noelle-Neumann, 1974).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Even though prejudice is a topic of interest for Social Psychology for years now (Stangor, 2016), researchers usually focus on the origins of prejudice and the active perpetuation of it in discriminatory behaviors. In this study, the focus was not on prejudiced behavior, but on the absence of overt reactions when facing discrimination and the permissiveness that this represents, which was called collusion. The aim of this study was to investigate how collusion is defined and perceived by different social identity groups, and to identify the variables related to it from those groups' perspective.

The data described shows that collusion is a socially experienced phenomenon and recognized in all identities and oppression systems approached. It is concluded that collusion can be explained based on socialization, context features and cost-effective balance variables. Socialization describes the social interaction as the background that shapes behavior based on group expectations and standards. It is through the socialization process that individuals become aware of who they are, which group they belong to, and how the outgroup members should be treated. Hence, it would involve cultural learning, family traditions, and group identity characteristics that influence one's understanding of the social world. Alternatively, Context Features describe what about the current situation (i.e., the importance of the group for the individual, and the kind of relationship established with the perpetrator and/or with the target of discrimination) can influence the individual decision to collude or not. Further, the decision to confront is weighted in a cost-effective balance reason, in which the individual believes that he or she has the requirements to perform the confrontational behavior and to produce the desired outcomes, diminishing the subjective costs of it.

It is imperative to point out that this was an exploratory study, which provides initial data for investigating permissiveness in face of prejudice and discrimination. Still, it is necessary to explore the phenomenon in different societies and with different methodological approaches to consolidate an explanatory theory for it.

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