Opinion Science Podcast

Hosted by Andy Luttrell

Confronting Prejudice with Margo Monteith

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Andy Luttrell:
There's this scene in the movie Finding Nemo that I think about a lot. Nemo is stuck in the fish tank at a dentist's office with a bunch of other fish. They've hatched a plan to escape, and it all starts by letting the fish tank get dirty, covered with algae. The plan is to let it get so dirty, that they'll have to take the fish out to clean the tank, and that's when they'll make a break for it.
But one of Nemo's new buddies in the tank is Jacques—he's a cleaner shrimp, which I only just learned is actually a popular aquarium fish…or shrimp. And they're called cleaner shrimp because that's what they do, the scrub and rid the environment of parasites.

Anyhow, imagine Jacques' dilemma. His whole thing is cleaning, it's a habit he's known his whole life. And the tank is getting filthier and filthier. He knows that for the good of the team, he needs to let the tank be dirty even though his impulse is to clean. And sure enough, he leans into his routine and starts scrubbing. But Gill, the leader of the tank gang, calls Jacques out for doing the wrong thing.

Gill:
Jacques, I said no cleaning.

Jacques:
I am ashamed.

Andy Luttrell:
That part. That little 3-word line in the movie, complete with dubious French accent. That's the line my brain comes back to over and over again. Because living in the world is hard, especially when you're trying to do the right thing. When we slip up and act in ways that don't live up to our standards, we feel guilty but in away that makes us realize…ohhh, I need to watch out for these situations in the future and do the right thing next time. We need to call ourselves out or let other people call us out if we're going to grow.

Like I remember one time I was having an issue with my car battery. Personally, I don't really understand how my car works or what to do when it stops working, so I headed to an auto parts shop and walked right up to someone who worked there to ask for help. Except, uh, as this man

quite nicely informed me, he didn't work there. He just matched my stereotype of guys that work in auto repair.

Jacques:
I am ashamed.

Andy Luttrell:
Or another time on social media, I posted some comment where I referred to something as my "spirit animal." And very quickly, I got a DM from someone I knew, sharing a link with a note that said: "I saw your comment and wanted to share this, about why it's actually not great to use the term spirit animal."

Jacques:
I am ashamed.

Andy Luttrell:
And I should be clear, the guilt I felt in those moments wasn't like punishing, overwhelming shame. But like Jacques, I knew immediately that I'd made a mistake, jumped to a stereotyped conclusion, or said something ignorant and insensitive. And like, that guilt is good because it means I want to do better, and it's motivating because in those moments I created clear rules for myself for the future to help me live out my values and avoid these kinds of predicaments. I don't think I'll ever quiet my inner Jacques for good, but I can keep working at it.

You're listening to Opinion Science, the show about our opinions, where they come from, and how they change. I'm Andy Luttrell. And this week we'll here from Dr. Margo Monteith. She's a Distinguished Professor of Psychological Sciences at Purdue University, and she's spent her career trying to understand the potential benefits of confronting our own prejudices…and confronting other people's prejudices. Just like my examples a couple minutes ago, Margo's work highlights how important it can be to keep ourselves in check and to call people out when they're being unfair. I was excited to get her perspective on why and how we should do this, so let's pop over to our conversation.

[Interview Begins]

Andy Luttrell:
Just to get us thinking about all the work that you've done in this area of confronting the prejudices that exist in our communities and in our societies amongst other people, I'm curious like in the very beginning, what was the seed of it for you that you thought, "You know what? I think there's something valuable here that there's an answer to if I apply our methods to figure it out."

Margo Monteith:
Well, I guess that was a very long time ago when I was a graduate student in Trish Devine's lab, so she had just recently published her seminal 1989 paper on breaking the prejudice habit, where she distinguished between the automatic and controlled components of stereotyping and prejudice, and talked about how people not responding in biased ways is like breaking a bad habit, that one

needs to become aware that one has responses that are biased, and then work on consciously, very consciously replacing those biased reactions with less biased thoughts, feelings, behaviors.

And we had begun, when I was at Wisconsin and in her lab, we had begun to investigate this notion of prejudice related discrepancies, which was whether people are aware that they sometimes do respond, actually do respond in ways that are more prejudiced than they think they should. And we had found that indeed people appeared to be aware, which was… At the time, a lot of folks in the field thought people just weren't aware at all, so just finding that people reported that they were aware of these biases that they had even though they didn't want to have those biases, and that that predicted negative self-directed affect or feeling guilty and disappointed with the self.

So, anyhow, and I began to think about whether what this process would involve, where people would learn how to recognize and to stop themselves from responding in biased ways, and whether that process might be able to be kind of automatized with practice so that individuals could learn to… You know, something triggers a stereotype but then that triggers a process of control and inhibition. And allowing individuals to kind of like stop, and then figure out how to respond in a way that would be consistent with their standards, and so that's when I became interested in the topic of self-regulation.

Andy Luttrell:
I'm curious. So, you mentioned what was surprising or not at the time to people, and it reminded me when I talked to Mahzarin Banaji for this, and she was talking about talking, just suggesting implicit biases was just such a novel… It really just makes me wonder. What was the culture of work in the field that was interested in prejudice? It is so ingrained now in most corners of the field that we study today, but that wasn't always the case, so I'm curious like when you were getting interested, did you join Trish's lab because that was the thing you were interested in? Or did it sort of sweep you up just because you were there?

Margo Monteith:
Well, I actually went to Wisconsin to work with Len Berkowitz, and on aggression, and I didn't really know about Trish yet because she'd just gotten out of grad school. She'd just gotten to her new job at Wisconsin. When I started was when she was starting. She hadn't published her '89 paper yet. Anyhow, I wanted to work on the topic of aggression, which also shared this applied problem with potentially identifying some practical solutions. But then I started to attend Trish's research group meetings and just kind of fell in love with that as a topic. Sorry, Andy, it was how I got interested in that as a topic in grad school?

Andy Luttrell:
Yeah. You're right to wonder because I did sort of ask two things at exactly the same time, so you got the part of I was curious about like where you came from at the start of this, like was that always an interest? But also, what was sort of the culture of the field at the time when it came to talking about things like prejudice, right? Was there a sense that this was still a widespread aspect of our social psychology? Or really it was sort of fringy at that time to be thinking about how these automatic judgments can pop into mind when we're talking to someone from a different background as us?

Margo Monteith:
Yeah. So, at the time we had Gaertner and Dovidio's work, and Gaertner and Dovidio's work really set up, I think, in many ways, and the aversive racism framework, set up the notion that people could have biased responses at the same time that they might hold egalitarian beliefs consciously. And yet in that framework and at that time, as far as they kind of had gotten with the research and the theory at that time, was that people were more prejudiced than they wanted to admit. You know, it was the idea that people were kind of hiding their biases or they would engage in biased responses when they could get away with it and explain it in ways that didn't have to do with race or group membership.

So, they could say, "You know, I didn't do that because of the person's color of their skin. I did that because of this other factor in the situation." And so, at the time researchers hadn't kind of gotten to the place where they thought about the possibility that people could both consciously really, truly endorse egalitarianism, and yet have biases that occurred automatically, be prone to these implicit biases.

So, some might say that Gaertner and Dovidio's work really says much the same thing, but it's a different twist, right? And I think that's often how we make progress, to be honest, in social psychology, is we kind of are onto something and then all of a sudden boom, there's a theory to explain it. There's an explanation for it. And Gaertner and Dovidio were doing the very, very early priming research where they would look at facilitation to negative words. For example, when they're preceded by pictures of Black people versus white people, and so they were doing some of that very, very early priming research, but they weren't describing it in the same way that we have come to understand it in this more modern or contemporized way of truly, sincerely embracing egalitarianism while still being prone to biased responses. Now, I don't mean to suggest that the aversive racist doesn't exist, or that Gaertner and Dovidio's framework was somehow incorrect. I think it can reside, it exists, alongside the notion that some people are just hiding it. Yes. But at the same time, some people aren't.

Andy Luttrell:
It sort of seems like the key distinction is the aversive racism model is just that people are… They can't admit it because they don't know it. They just have these secret biases. And in some ways that makes it all the more difficult to do anything about it, right? Which is the real value of saying, "Wait a minute. Maybe people can be aware of when they don't live up to their values." Right? And so, not just me. I often liken this to a self-control conflict based in much part to the work that you and others have done, where when I tell students about it it's kind of like just imagine… This happened to me, like when I stopped eating meat. I go, "Well, I have now this new goal and I can be now sort of attentive to how well I'm reaching this goal." And you're gonna make mistakes, right? In those early days I had a fair amount of meat that I didn't expect to have because I wasn't sophisticated about it yet. You know, you place an order at the restaurant and all of a sudden you go, "Oh no, wait. No, that's not the kind of thing that I was supposed to order." Or you sort of don't realize you're supposed to read the labels as closely as you need to if this is really important to you.

And so, the idea is like yeah, you're gonna try and fail, but as long as you keep your eye on that goal for the long term you can sort of build sort of a savvy way of moving through the world that

you can actually behave in line with the values that you sort of hold onto consciously. So, that's my example, and so I'm gonna throw it back to you to sort of plug that into the prejudice control model, right? How does thinking about prejudice in this kind of everyday, self-control, breaking habits way give us something to latch onto as a model for confronting our own personal prejudices?

Margo Monteith:
Yeah. Most definitely. This is a model about self-control. And builds on the classic control models. And also, contemporary work about kind of automaticity and control and how the brain can react to stimuli with preconscious forms of control. Anyhow, so most definitely the self-regulation of prejudice is a form of conflict detection and motivational processes to work toward responding in ways that are consistent with one's standards. I like your example because part of what it illustrates with not eating meat anymore is automaticity of a certain kind of responding, automatically ordering meat or whatever, or just grabbing something and taking a bite of it. I don't know. So, sometimes things are automatized, and that's why we respond in certain ways.

But also, your example illustrates that sometimes we just don't know what to watch out for. And so, we may not realize we should look at the labels. You're saying we should look at the labels of certain kinds of products to make sure that meat isn't in them. I'm a vegetarian and same thing for me. Sometimes I'm like, "You're kidding!"

Andy Luttrell:
Yeah. What?

Margo Monteith:
There's meat in that? I never… Yeah.

Andy Luttrell:
I wouldn't have thought to check.

Margo Monteith:
Yeah. Yeah. But the same thing can happen a lot of the times with biases, right? We don't realize that the things that we do a lot of the times are biased. And so, we lack the very knowledge… You know, we haven't read the label. We haven't really gained the knowledge to realize that what we are saying is offensive, or that how we are behaving doesn't take, for example, individuals' culture into account, or other examples. So, this is definitely a process where in the model I talk about establishing cues for control, and so messing up is part of the process of learning to self-regulate one's biases.

And so, when we catch ourselves, when we come to the realization that we have engaged in a response that's more biased than we think we should, and that might be something as simple as like laughing at a biased joke, that helps us to establish environmental cues that can then serve as signals to trigger this control process on this… It can trigger us to in the future slow down in our thinking and just for those milliseconds to kind of reroute the response generation process so that it can be more consistent with how we want to respond.

Andy Luttrell:
So, this has all been about confronting your own biases and sort of keeping a check on whether you're maybe leaping to a conclusion more quickly than you ought to. But what about when we're in these situations where we see other people jumping to conclusions and we think is it on me? Am I gonna be the one who has to say, "You know, I don't think that's the right conclusion to reach, or I don't think it's quite appropriate to say that?" How important do you think it is for those kinds of confrontations to happen, too, if we're to work toward a less biased world?

Margo Monteith:
Yeah. I mean, confrontation is just absolutely essential. A change doesn't occur without confrontation, especially in the area of bias and prejudice reduction. You know, when I was working with the model, the self-regulation model, and how people can confront themselves and learn to detect their biases and reduce them, in many ways it just wasn't satisfying because it all rests on people realizing themselves that they're doing something biased. And you know, as Mahzarin Banaji and others' research shows, many, many studies have shown we just often… We don't have that kind of self-insight. And it's gonna take other individuals to point out biases.

So, other confrontation is most definitely necessary to achieve more equitable environments and to control discrimination in environments, I believe. And making confrontation normative, that this is something that people know they can and should do, I think is very, very important.

Andy Luttrell:
You'd think that this would be a very desired, like if I'm really motivated to keep my prejudices in check and I go, "You know what? I don't have all the tools to do it. Please, everybody, just tell me. Tell me. Shout it out whenever I make a mistake." That would be a very useful tool for me to reach my goal. But I think we know that that isn't always how people experience it, so in what ways… I guess really the question becomes in what ways do these kinds of confrontations really excel, and do what they're supposed to do, and everybody comes out ahead, and where are the breaking points of confrontation where you go, "Well, it might be helpful for this reason, but it's kind of counterproductive for this reason?" If you could just sort of open up these confrontation experiences to see when are they good and when do they have these side effects.

Margo Monteith:
Yeah, so research done on interpersonal confrontation, so one person confronting or another, or in small group contexts, finds over and over and over again that following confrontation, people reduce their biases. They reduced their biases a week later. On a similar test, their biases are lower on other tests that are somewhat related, and even across time. So, for example, Kim Chaney's research has shown that if you confront people about negative stereotyping, they will also subsequently reduce their positive stereotyping about groups. And if you confront with respect to a particular group, let's say prejudiced remarks in relation to Black people, that people also will be more likely to control or reduce their biased remarks in connection with other people, or assumptions, inferences that they make with other groups.

And so, it is very, very successful. Now, we have, we meaning research in this area, have largely examined confrontation in societal contexts where the biases that we're looking at are generally where people… General norms across society say you shouldn't really have those biases. You

shouldn't really do sexist things. You really shouldn't have racial biases of this sort. If you go to an environment where that's not accepted, where people think, "Well, yeah, of course women should not be treated as well," and you try to confront people, it's not gonna work. It's gonna result probably only in backlash. And so, by and large confrontation is successful in reducing biases. We find that across so many different moderators, whether you do it in a hostile manner, in a really nice and sweet manner, whether it concerns sexism or racism, although racism does reduce a little bit more, you still get confrontation reducing sexist responses.

So, it's just remarkably effective and consistently so, and across time. But where you get… You can at the same time the confrontation reduces biases, people often do have that kind of negative reaction. So, there are social costs to confrontation. And just as effective as confrontation is at reducing bias, it is also consistent, and reliably, and across time it does have negative effects on how the confronters are perceived. Because people don't like to be criticized. They don't like to be called out. And even if they might think in their mind, "Yeah, I want people to call me out," when it's done, when it actually happens to them there's this feeling like, "Geez." And there are these social costs of confrontation.

So, we've been looking a lot at how to try to reduce those social costs.

Andy Luttrell:
And as a people pleaser I need to ask, is it just that's just gonna happen, right? There's no way to get around this. You're gonna still like me and I'm gonna call you out, that doesn't seem like that's how it works.

Margo Monteith:
So, we are starting to find factors that can play a role in the extent of social costs and that can really reduce them a lot. So, for example, Laura Hildebrand's dissertation research looked at the role of interpersonal trust, and so if you trust that this person has your back, if you trust that this person has good intentions for you, social costs are attenuated a great deal when people are confronted about their biases. So, most of the confrontation research has been done in lab settings or similar where we're interacting with strangers. But really, confrontations often occur when you know people, right? And so, for example, when friends confront friends, social costs are much lower than if you are confronted by a stranger.

So, interpersonal trust is something that naturally exists a lot of the times, and that we can foster, so for example in organizations, if you really want to create a culture that encourages confrontation and not social cost to confrontation, not perceiving people negatively for having confronted you, what you want to do is not only teach people how to confront and set the norm that that's accepted in this environment, because it's all toward making our environments freer of discrimination, more equitable. If you can at the same time have trust-building exercises among your employees, then you may be able to set up more of a win-win situation.

There's a recent article out by Aneeta Rattan and Katie Kroeper and others showing that if confrontations have embedded with them a growth mindset, and so the bias is pointed out, but then the person says, "I know people can change these things, and so I just… I wanted to point it out,"

rather than a fixed mindset, like, "I know people are just prejudiced or not, so you're probably not gonna be able to change it."

Andy Luttrell:
I'm just letting you know you're a prejudiced person.

Margo Monteith:
Yeah. Yeah. Just letting you know you do this. Exactly. The growth mindset is associated with lower social cost. And so, to the extent that our confrontations can communicate to the person that, "Look, I'm not trying to impugn your image as being egalitarian or fair. That's not what I'm suggesting here. I'm not trying to impugn your image as a non-prejudiced person. I'm not trying to. This is not to make you feel prejudiced." To the extent that that can be done, social costs are lower.

Andy Luttrell:
It reminds me too as I'm thinking about of some of, like a version of the self-regulation model being possibly helpful in that now I'm not looking for moments of me being prejudiced in that way. I'm looking out for moments of me being unreasonably mad at other people for calling me out, right? Can we teach people to go, "Listen, sometimes people are gonna call you out for saying the wrong thing. But when that happens, you should remind yourself that they have your interests at heart. You, yourself said you want to get better at this," sort of instantiating those values in a kind of when I see it, this is what I'll think of, and maybe that could help smooth things over, as well?

Margo Monteith:
Yeah. I think so. And you do see that kind of reasoning in folks who do work in more applied settings where they rely on the literature and help people understand the nature of implicit biases, and that it can occur automatically, and then just how important therefore confrontation is, and that we should accept this as something that it's okay and should even be welcomed if we are to grow as an organization, as an environment where bias is less likely to occur.

Andy Luttrell:
And to your point, too, about making it more normal to confront, that could also take the sting out of it too. Because right now you go, "Do you tell everyone this? Are you just calling me out? I've never heard this." Whereas if it's just standard protocol to, "Hey, just so you know, you said this when I'm sure you meant this, and maybe next time say it differently," you go, "Oh yeah. This is the kind of advice we give each other in this society." By normalizing it, do you think that it would take the sting out of the social cost part of it?

Margo Monteith:
Yeah. Yeah. I think so. Yeah. Normalizing it. A lot of the times these biases, people do something or say something, and they don't realize that plays on a stereotype, or that it's actually something biased. So, for example, I was in a meeting with other faculty members once and somebody who was not Black said to a Black woman, "I think you're really getting aggressive about this. I think that it just seems like you're being loud and getting aggressive." And you know, I think that person didn't understand what was going on in that situation and his perception of it was being fed by

stereotypes. You know, that's gonna take a lesson for that person to understand what's going on there. Once again, Andy, I think I just went on a tangent.

Andy Luttrell:
No, I was tracking it. It sounded good to me. But to the point of feeling sort of it's incumbent on me to call someone out, one of my favorite stories of our world in social psych is one that I heard about you at a conference years ago, at a comedy show, and I know you know where I'm going with this, so could you recount this experience? Just as a like a one, how did this happen in the first place? And also, like what was going through your mind as maybe you were reflecting on the utility of the work that you do?

Margo Monteith:
Yeah. So, we were at this conference that so many in the field attend, and it's a really cool conference. Back at this time the conference had events in the evening that we attended as a group, and at this conference the organizers had set up a comedy show, for us to see a comedy show, which was really cool. And so, we have a whole bunch of social psychologists in the audience, and we shared, I guess, this event with I think it was people at an insurance convention in the same area, so there were two groups there. A bunch of social psychologists and a bunch of insurance people. So, there was a comedian that promised to be quite good, and that comedian, though, had a warmup act, and the warmup act came on and the whole routine, all of the jokes centered on homophobia and really were making fun of gay people, and doing kind of parodies, and it just… It was essentially gay bashing in the whole routine.

And you know, I looked around, I was sitting at a table with somebody who happened to be gay. I'm kind of looking at them like, "Oh my God." And you know, you could kind of hear the audience, like they weren't really laughing except some of the insurance folks, but you could kind of hear some groans every once in a while, but they were getting laughs. He was getting some laughs and everything. But it just became so nasty. I just felt like this comedian was being so nasty and so my intention was to leave, but as I left I had to walk right across, kind of in front of the stage area given where I was sitting, to then go down the aisle to exit out.

And so, I'm standing, essentially I found myself standing in front of the comedian, and I said, "Would you stop with these jokes? We don't enjoy these jokes. Do you know who this audience is?" And so, I confronted the comedian essentially about the biased content. And it did disrupt the comedian's routine.

Andy Luttrell:
It would be hard not to.

Margo Monteith:
Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And I left. Your question centered on whether I was thinking about my research on confrontation, which I was just beginning at that time, and most definitely I am sure the fact that I was thinking about confrontation in a lot of my work life, and coming up with paradigms, and thinking about how it worked, and why people didn't do it, and when they should be doing it, most definitely I'm sure that that played into what I did in that moment. Yeah. Which was difficult to do, because I was young in the field at the time and was sure that not everyone was gonna react

kindly to somebody doing this. Not everybody would view that as a positive thing. You can dislike something but don't go and disrupt what's going on.

Anyhow, so I'm sure that was all… My work was salient in my mind, but what drove that confrontation at that moment really was exasperation, frustration, and anger that this is what we were sitting in front of and just kind of taking it like we had to because we were there. And you know, we didn't have to.

Andy Luttrell:
And you could feel those things and just quietly slink away, right? That's probably often what people think. They go, "It's not my place to really do anything and I'll just sort of not say anything, but I won't support it." But to actually take the extra step and say, "You know what? This is not the way we should be talking. This isn't appropriate. This isn't good." That's a step that people don't often take, but as your work shows, it has an impact, right? It makes a difference. And I'm wondering now, if we were to find this comedian again and see how his set has evolved over time-

Margo Monteith:
Oh, his act? Yeah.

Andy Luttrell:
Is it the same as back then? Or maybe you were the catalyst to change the trajectory, right? Because your work would suggest that it could have, at least in some small way, and in a bigger sense I wanted to get your take on why is this such an impactful thing to do, right? You said confrontation reduces bias. Over and above, like even under all these different conditions, it just reliably has this impact, but why? What is it? Why is this the thing that actually can do so much of the work?

Margo Monteith:
Yeah. That's a great question. I think that that's a really good question. I think that bias historically, using stereotypes, making those remarks, hey, hey, hey, under the breath, or doing things subtly that are biased, it's always… Even after civil rights movement, it's been kind of an accepted part of the mainstream and majority group behavior, which is… Let's take men and sexism, for example. You know, there's a lot of sexism out there and not just of the benevolent form. But you know, there's boys will be boys, and there's still those remarks, and there's still-

Andy Luttrell:
Locker room talk.

Margo Monteith:
Still that kind of behavior. Or even kind of subtle things. You're out to dinner with these male colleagues and they're all called sir by the wait staff. Sir, sir, sir, and you get to you, and you're called sweety or honey. It's still accepted. It's so much these kinds of biases. Oh, come on. It's just kind of accepted, and yet they do so much harm, and so I think that confrontation is just so powerful because it tells people that's not acceptable here. That's absolutely not something that I'm gonna accept. And we've looked at affirmed confrontations, where other people in the situation chime in or don't. We manipulate that. So, other people will say, "Yeah. She's right. That's not the kind of thing that's accepted here." Or it's not affirmed. And if it's affirmed, that has an even

more powerful role on communicating that no, you just really… You can't do that here. You know, and the perception of norms, that it's not okay to do something biased.

And so, I think that's part of where confrontation's power comes from, is it makes it clear. I'm not gonna accept this. I'm not just gonna laugh it off. I'm not gonna just say like, "Oh, those things will happen, or boys will be boys, or well, that's just part of how they were raised." I think so many of us are kind of taught like, "Oh, don't speak up. Let that go." And confrontation just puts the gate down and says, "Nope."

Andy Luttrell:
It's also immediate, right? As opposed to like oh, in three weeks we're gonna have bias training in the breakroom. You go, "Well, that's just so withdrawn from the moment in which I am actually saying the thing or doing the thing that's inappropriate." Whereas confrontation just says, "Hey, right now, before you forget you did this," it's like they talk about punishment, right? It has to be swift and appropriate to the thing that it is that you did. And it's kind of what confrontation is. You go like, "Oh, I roll in the currency of social acceptance, and you took it away from me at the moment I did the bad thing." There's nowhere to run from it, right? You're sort of… You're faced with it. You either have to concoct some explanation for yourself or go, "Well, yeah. Maybe I am actually a subject to this as I say that I am."

Margo Monteith:
Yeah. Yeah. Or even if you don't want to admit or accept the message kind of as like, "Okay, I believe I shouldn't do this," still the confrontation tells you that you can't get away with doing that in this environment.

Andy Luttrell:
You mentioned the affirming confrontations and it reminded me of what I think is a very important direction that this is going in, which is confrontation is not only maybe like makes me feel good for saying, "Hey, I confronted the bully." It not only may chip away at bias in the other person, but it may also communicate an air of acceptance more broadly to those folk with marginalized identities within earshot. Being able to say, like you said, at this show, someone standing up and saying this isn't right is a powerful thing not only to get the comedian to change course, but also to communicate to folks in the room like, "Hey, you don't have to tolerate this either. This is a place where we ultimately want to have each other's backs."

So, could you describe a little bit the direction that that has gone in?

Margo Monteith:
Yeah. Sure. So, we looked at whether confrontations could serve as an identity safety cue for members of marginalized groups in a series of experiments. So, this research showed that when members of a group about which a bias has occurred in a certain environment, when that bias is confronted and it's affirmed by other people who speak up too, and they say, "Yeah, you shouldn't be saying that, or yeah, let's be a little more fair in this environment," if it's affirmed by others in the environment, as well, that helps to communicate to members of marginalized groups or minoritized groups that their identity is safe in that environment, okay? That they can feel comfortable in that environment.

So, stepping back, if somebody is a member of a minoritized group and they observe that someone has said something biased, let's say in a work setting. Maybe they're interviewing for a job, and they observe someone who says something biased. They're gonna say, "No way. I don't want to be in that environment. My identity is not gonna be safe in that environment." Now, can a confrontation help to restore the sense that their identity could be safe in that environment? Not just a confrontation, it turns out. Not just one person confronting another. One confronter is not enough to restore identity safety. It takes other individuals who are also there to chime in and say, "Yeah, come on. Come on. Think twice before you make those kinds of comments." Or to say, "Oh, I agree. I agree with the person who did the confrontation." Just to speak up in some little way.

And that helps to convey to members of minoritized groups identity safety, that they can feel comfortable in this environment. Knowing other people are going to speak up and confront bias and aren't gonna just sit back and let it happen, you know? It's best if bias didn't occur in the first place, right?

Andy Luttrell:
Right.

Margo Monteith:
Yeah? But we know bias does occur. And so, it's wonderful to know that you have allies, that your identity can be safe.

Andy Luttrell:
That's great. As we wrap up, I'm curious. What are the new directions this is taking? I mean, this is a… We've pretty much done a career spanning overview here in the last 30, 40 minutes. But there's still, I'm sure, new questions to tackle, so what are sort of the things that you're working on these days that maybe push this even further?

Margo Monteith:
Yeah. So, as I mentioned, we are really trying to understand how social costs can be reduced because many people do not confront because they fear social costs. And people feel guilty, and they ruminate on the fact that they didn't confront, and they feel bad in the future if they don't confront. Still, at that time and in that moment, it is difficult to get yourself to confront. And so, because of the fear of social cost, because people, like you said, they want to roll in social currency. They want to feel accepted. And so, we're focusing in a number of studies on understanding how social costs can be mitigated.

We're also looking at the extent to which confrontations actually do serve to establish non-prejudiced descriptive and injunctive norms in the environment. This has kind of been an assumption, that they help to establish those norms, you know, like they communicate that prejudice isn't accepted in the environment, but another possibility is that folks look at the confronter and they say, "They must be a social justice warrior. There must be something kind of weird about them that they would confront like that, because after all, it's not being nice to confront." So, does confrontation actually establish descriptive norms, antibias descriptive norms,

that people do not do biased things in this environment? And does it establish injunctive norms, that you should not do things in this environment? So, we're examining that in a series of studies.

And the answer so far is that even non-affirmed confrontation establishes those injunctive norms, that you shouldn't do things that are biased in this environment, and to some extent establishes the descriptive norms. But we know that injunctive norms are much more important for transsituational influence and for guiding behavior than descriptive norms. So, it's good news.

Andy Luttrell:
Good. Well, that is great to hear, and I just wanted to say thanks for taking all the time to walk us through the work that you've done in this.

Margo Monteith:
Yeah. Thank you so much, Andy, for asking great questions and having me on. I feel like I rambled too much, but hopefully you get something useful out of it.

Andy Luttrell:
No, this was great.

Andy Luttrell:
Alrighty that'll do it for this episode of Opinion Science. Thank you to Margo Monteith for sharing her work with us. As always, head to the webpage for this episode to see her website and find links to the research we talked about.

Make sure you're subscribed to Opinion Science wherever you get podcasts. Or I think maybe I should say follow Opinion Science on your favorite podcast app? I don't know—do what you need to do to stay in the loop about new episodes. If Twitter still exists, we're @OpinionSciPod. If you're still on Facebook, also OpinionSciPod. Listen, I don't know what social media we're going to have in a month, but as long as we at least for the internet, OpinionSciencePodcast.com is the place to find all the episodes, all the transcripts and links, all the everything.

Oh, and for U.S. listeners, I hope you enjoy Thanksgiving this week, however it is you plan to do so. Mostly I'm looking forward to not responding to emails for a few days and making a pie. It's the little things. Okeedoke, that's it for me. See you in a couple weeks for more Opinion Science. Buh bye…