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### **“An Untold Story”: Voices of QTBIPOC Individuals Who Have Been Canceled Through Public Call Outs**

Glorivette Rodriguez  
grodriguez17@usfca.edu

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University of San Francisco

# **“An Untold Story”: Voices of QTBIPOC Individuals Who Have Been Canceled Through Public Call Outs**

A Thesis Proposal Presented to  
The Faculty of the School of Education  
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in Human Rights Education

By  
Glorivette Rodriguez  
May 2023

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## ABSTRACT

QTBIPOC communities are historically marginalized groups that experience oppression and discrimination. Oftentimes, this experience goes unnoticed, unacknowledged, and unrecognized because these groups are intentionally erased and silenced by dominant culture. Keeping the communities safe is a priority, and it is no wonder that social media is being used as a “necessary survival technology” (brown, 2020, p. 45) to call out injustices and harm. Unfortunately, communities are unskilled in navigating conflict using a transformative justice approach and thus, used this tool unskillfully, which has been referred to as “knee-jerk callouts” (brown, 2020, p. 40). This study explores the experiences and impacts of QTBIPOC individuals who have been publicly called out through testimonios of two QTBIPOC folx who have been called out and two QTBIPOC community leaders that support in community accountability and transformative justice. Put into conversation with each other, these testimonios show that there is an understanding of why marginalized communities employ the tool, while also highlighting the need for community skill development in transformative justice, curiosity, and self-accountability.

Keywords: QTBIPOC, LGBTQ BIPOC, transformative justice, call out culture, public call outs, accountability, conflict

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This thesis was built by the testimonios of QTBIPOC individuals who have been publicly called out or support those who have. I would love to express my gratitude to the individuals I interviewed. I am honored and hold deep gratitude for the permission you granted me to learn more about your story, about a difficult time in your personal life or that of those you support. Your story and experience matters and I thank you for entrusting me to use your experience in this research to learn and develop more scholarship around call out culture within QTBIPOC communities.

Lastly, I would like to thank the communities that I am a part of. They have encouraged me throughout my graduate school experience. My friends, family, and chosen family, thank you for all of your support. I see you and I thank you.

## CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

*“Every person can become a butterfly.” La Espiritista (2019)*

In *Butterfly: Una Transformacion*, La Espiritista (2019) shares poetry that represents the four phases of metamorphosis. I will attempt to share what brought me to focus my thesis on callout culture within QTBIPOC communities through each of the four phases in the transformation process.

**RELEASE:** “Release your grief. Release your old wounds. Release your trauma. Release your pain and heartbreak,” (Espiritista et al, 2019, p. xi).

This topic of call out culture is personal to me. I was called out on social media and then canceled by the community I was building with because of harm that I caused another. I did not know then what I know today and I am deeply sorry. While it has been four years since the public call out on social media, since the end of many relationships, since the closure of many doors, I presently carry a fear and confusion of my place within the QTBIPOC community in Oakland, CA. I have conditioned myself to not take up space in the community. I am still grieving the loss.

I am also grieving the experiences of QTBIPOC individuals I have witnessed being called out on social media by other QTBIPOC folx. I have witnessed the tool being used against these already vulnerable populations with impacts that cost them their resources for survival, such as: employment, housing stability, and social capital in bodies that are already policed and demonized. While I can understand that a need was not being met and a harm/injustice had occurred in the private sphere, witnessing the enactment of the tool felt both like a call for help and a need for vengeance. It was not being used from a place of love and I felt like the pain that the person enacting the call out tool held was not only rooted in the behavior of the “perpetrator”

being called out, but also in the pain carried by past hurts/harms of other folx that were not named in the call out; the QTBIPOC individual publicly called out becomes the “sacrificial lamb” to not only call out their behavior in hopes for that person to change and be accountable, but for the behavior to end within everyone who has enacted it. I carry a sadness for all parties and a wish for there to have been a different way to address the infraction.

**RENEWAL:** “Joy is the resurrection of grief,” (Espiritista et al, 2019, p. xi).

I caused pain and hurt within the community I called home and as a result and consequence I was publicly called out on social media with a messaging of my disposability from QTBIPOC community spaces, the catalyst to the healing journey I am currently and will forever be on. During this time, I was forced to find help outside of the community. I was forced to lead with my history and lean on faith that there will be others willing to help me understand what was happening during a very confusing time; a time I needed community not isolation. My grief led me to new people, places, and things, and there is a joy in becoming aware of my default settings, of my unconscious, and in receiving wisdom from the experience. There is joy in knowing that despite my history, I am still deserving to be a part of a community.

**RETREAT:** “Through death comes rebirth. New life is within the dying of that which no longer serves you. Destruction from the most turbulent of storms brings forth innovative creation,” (Espiritista et al, 2019, p. xi).

I still hold pain, guilt, and shame. I avoid spaces. I avoid opportunities. At times, I wonder about reintegration, and this wondering is balanced with knowing that, with this particular community, reintegration is not a reality. I feel alone, as one result of the callout was my excommunication from that community. In this time away I died, figuratively. I stuffed this experience deep down somewhere, where I did not need to look at how I was impacted. This is

not about scorekeeping, about right versus wrong, but to highlight that I too had an experience that resulted in its own impacts. This thesis serves as my rebirth.

**REBIRTH:** “Emerge in your radiant truth. Spread your wings and allow them to encompass the entirety of who you are without shame,” (Espiritista et. al, 2019, p. xi).

This thesis is personal. By examining callout culture within QTBIPOC communities, I hope not to dishonor nor negate the experiences of individuals who experience injustice. Dominance inflicts harm and oftentimes those receiving the harm are coerced into silence and experience erasure. This thesis is not to justify oppressive actions that perpetuate cycles of violence and harm done to historically marginalized individuals, but rather, to explore the nuances and complexities involved. I admit that four years ago, I was not acting from a place of love, an open and honest expression of “care, affection, responsibility, respect, commitment, and trust,” (hooks, 2001, p. 14). My hope for this thesis is to demonstrate love for all those impacted by the cycles of violence and punishment, particularly the QTBIPOC community. My intention is to make living amends through intentional action rooted in my integrity and desire to unlearn my own internalized oppression and my indoctrination of dominance, control, and punishment. Holding the both/and will require that I examine myself throughout this research to ensure that I am approaching the work from a place of turning towards others rather than turning away. This research will contribute to deepening the understanding of creating communities that can engage in curiosity and use tools that are not punitive, when faced with complex and nuanced situations that need to be addressed.

### **Statement of the Problem**

*“We will never solve the problem of violence with violence. We will never transform ourselves or anyone else into a better person by meting out pain and punishment. Only love can do that.”*



*Kai Cheng Thom (2021)*

Queer and trans, Black, Indigenous, people of color (QTBIPOC) communities are engaging in community-based accountability processes to address violence that occurs within community settings (Dixon, 2020). Social media is being used as a tool to callout QTBIPOC individuals that cause intragroup harm (Chin, 2018). According to Clark (2020) “canceling a person, place, or thing is [a] socially mediated phenomena with origins in queer communities of color” (p. 89). Through the ideology of white supremacy imprinted in the fabric of American society, QTBIPOC communities have been socialized to address injustice through the right and righteous versus wrong and bad dichotomy, which results in the punishment of the accused offender (YouTube, 2019). Punitive approaches to address conflict, harm, and injustice in communities lack regard to complexity and nuance that need to be accounted for (Ross, 2019). Communities are employing unprincipled callouts and are not “aligned with the lineage of this tactic,” causing a deep division, shunning people, and deepening or creating new wounds for oppressed peoples (brown, 2020, p. 40). We must remember that no one “wins when we shame survivors for using the available options when all such options are violent” (Dixon, 2020, p. 24), while also exploring the needs to better understand the outcomes of callouts. We must grow community skills in transformative justice to eliminate punishment, mob mentality, and harm and instead employ tools for accountability that restore human dignity and create room for healing.

### **Background and Need**

*“The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.” Audre Lorde (1979/1984)*

Violence is rooted in domination and “inextricably linked to all acts of violence in this society that occur between the powerful and powerless, the dominant and the dominated” (hooks, 1984, p. 118). Through the systems of oppression, we have internalized criminalization, where

we default to retaliation and punishment to address wrongdoing (Lamble, 2022). Dominant western approaches assume “innate badness” and prioritize individualism and a “hierarchy of value of people” (McCaslin, 2022, p. 177). The “terrorizing force of white supremacy” (hooks, 1992, p. 174), racism, slavery, and colonialism are the blueprint for the prison industrial complex (Stevenson, 2019) and punitive forms of addressing harm in society today. Those that benefit from dominant culture and ideology, benefit from the perpetuation of the cycles of violence, be it through the literal and figurative profits generated from movies and celebrity entertainment (DiAngelo, 2012) depicting violence, or the forced and free labor in prisons (Wu et al., 2020), among others (McIntosh, 1988). When addressing wrongdoing, our society goes on autopilot, where we automatically act on the ideas we have embodied from the punitive justice system, which contributes to the persistence of cycles of harm opposed to promoting collective healing (Lamble, 2022).

In the 21st century, social media has become a tool to callout injustice and give voice to those who are historically erased and silenced (Luu, 2019). Callout culture can do both good and harm, giving power to historically marginalized groups and, when misused, causing further harm (Luu, 2019). There is a need to investigate the use of social media callouts within intragroup dynamics, callouts targeted towards “ordinary citizens” (Luu, 2019, para. 10), which are different from public callouts directed at big corporations, like Crossfit, which was called out for its founder “trivializing the concerns of Black Lives Matter” (Kornhaber, 2020, para. 1).

QTBIPOC individuals experience multiple forms of oppression, which hooks (1984) refers to as “interlocking webs of oppression” (Biana, 2020 p. 13). How do we heal without perpetuating harm and using tools that do not promote collective healing? How do we handle conflict without punishing and disposing others? How do we build rather than tear down? What

is the role of callouts in organizing for accountability? Social media is linked with “reward learning,” where social media likes are “readily quantifiable compared to offline social rewards” which, as a result, contribute to the social conditioning of “maladaptive online behaviors” (Jackson, 2021, paras. 8-9). We are being conditioned to use social media as a first resort for receiving and sharing information; trusting what is viral, making rushed judgements, and contributing to the phenomena of mob mentality, fear mongering, (Wynn, 2020) and the culture of social disposability (Burks, 2019).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this thesis is to conduct qualitative research in order to examine the nuances and complexities of the use of social media public callouts as an accountability tool to address harm within the QTBIPOC community, a population that experiences multiple forms of oppression. This study collected testimonios from individuals who have experienced public callouts on social media and community leaders that support QTBIPOC individuals in healing cycles of violence and support repairing ruptures in communities through a transformative justice approach.

### **Research Questions**

*“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story.” Maya Angelou*

The analysis of the testimonios from QTBIPOC individuals who have been publicly called out and QTBIPOC individuals who support with community accountability aims to provide information on key research questions: What are the experiences of QTBIPOC folx with being publicly called out? What impact did the call out have? What did folx learn from the experience? What alternatives to call outs might better serve justice? This thesis answers these questions about the experience of public callouts within QTBIPOC communities in metropolitan

areas as a means to explore the impacts this phenomenon has on the individual who is called out and the need to voice injustice. This thesis also aims to understand transformative justice as an approach to accountability and end cycles of violence without perpetuating violence.

### **Theoretical Framework: Transformative Justice**

*“Radical simply means ‘grasping things at the root.’” Dr. Angela Y. Davis*

Transformative Justice (TJ) theory claims that cycles of violence and injustice within communities can be addressed without the presence and intervention of the state's retributive justice system, by including communities in transformative processes, not only focusing on the present conflict, but also recognizing the systemic oppression and social inequities at the root and building a future of social transformation. This section includes a brief history of transformative justice theory which includes (a) Morris' (1999) original scholarship claiming that transformative justice theory acknowledges the root and systemic causes of crimes and sees these violations as transformative opportunities for all, including community, to heal; (b) the ideas further developed by Nocella (2011) claiming that transformative justice theory challenges restorative justice (RJ) theory, by not only looking at the crime and conflict, but also recognizing the socio-political and economic issues of oppression present; (c) the work of Mingus (2019) that describes transformative justice as an abolitionist praxis that removes the oppressive systems that reproduce violence in marginalized communities and centers the values of the “world we want” (para. 11); and (d) the work of brown (Piepzna-Samarasinha & brown, 2020) that illustrates how transformative justice theory is a new orientation for communities and, as a result, has been practiced in unprincipled ways. This scholarship is important because it demonstrates that while transformative justice theory challenges punitive approaches in addressing harm and centers targeted and oppressed communities in responding to violence, it is an approach that

requires an unlearning of domination, punishment, and control as there is potential to replicate oppressive norms that perpetuate the cycles of violence that have been embedded in the fabric of how we deal with violence within communities in U.S. society.

The foundational work that defines transformative justice (TJ) theory includes Morris's (1999) *Why Transformative Justice?* This scholarship theorizes transformative justice as an approach that goes beyond retributive and restorative justice processes, where TJ focuses on the present violations, the root cause of the crime, and the future of the community. This theory challenges the analysis and practices of restorative justice, where Morris (1999) claims that "restorative justice reinforces structural injustices" (p. 5) by not addressing the institutional oppression within laws, police state, courts, and prisons. This original scholarship is important because it introduces a new justice approach to look at crime as an opportunity to unlearn punitive approaches, involve communities to nurture ways to end cycles of violence, and build healthy accountable communities that challenge oppression.

Building on this foundation, Nocella (2011) claims that transformative justice is opposed to punitive justice systems and is a step further from restorative justice, where TJ stresses the original conditions of violence, by "striving to use the conflict as an opportunity to address larger socio-political injustices" (p.4); sees the goodness in everyone, is "aware of complex systems of domination ... and oppos[es] arrest[s], imprison[ments], [retaliation at work], repress[ion], or oppress[ion]" (p. 4); and focuses on the transformative power of community healing, by "changing a negative or violent situation into a positive and peaceful one" (p. 4). Nocella (2011) shares examples of two organizations that have adopted transformative justice theory into their practices, Alternative to Violence Project (AVP), an organization "dedicated to providing a specialized nonviolence group-building, community building, and conflict transformation

workshop oriented for violent communities, regularly in adult male and female prisons” (Nocella, 2011, p. 5) and Generation Five, a transformative justice organization “dedicated to ending child sexual abuse” (Nocella, 2011, p. 6). Nocella (2011) expands the understanding of how to address crime by going beyond the individual incident and facing the societal oppression the crime is rooted in. Nocella’s contribution to the field of transformative justice theory is important because it emphasizes the ill of social oppression and humanizes individuals by not viewing anyone as the enemy, allowing there to be opportunities for transformative healing for all through community-centered approaches opposed to disposability and punishment.

Another addition to transformative justice is represented by Mingus (2019) who describes transformative justice as a political approach that seeks to respond to violence without perpetuating more harm and by creating possibilities for healing and accountability. This is related to the work of Morris (1999) and Nocella (2011) because it articulates why it is critical to not rely on the state and its tactics when responding to violence. Using TJ interventions that build relationships and communities to intervene when harm occurs prevents future instances of violence. Mingus’s ideas are important because they illustrate TJ responses as opportunities to build community infrastructures that address and prevent violence and create more safe and caring communities.

Providing a valuable critique, brown (Piepzna-Samarasinha & brown, 2020) articulates what transformative justice is not and questions whether those who want to transform the world have a common understanding of transformative justice. brown differs from the work of Morris (1999), Nocella (2011) and Mingus (2019) because she criticizes the ways in which communities have been implementing TJ, reverting back to punitive approaches by going against the principles of TJ which removes retributive systems and approaches and cultivates a world where

cycles of violence are prevented. brown's addition to the field of transformative justice theory is important because it examines the ways TJ approaches have been implemented in community accountability processes and identifies a need for community skill development to carry out TJ processes in ways that honor the integrity and purpose of the practice.

In summary, transformative justice theory claims that cycles of violence and injustice within communities can be addressed without the presence and intervention of the state's retributive justice system, by including communities in transformative processes, not only focusing on the present conflict, but also recognizing the systemic oppression and social inequities at the root and building a future of social transformation. Transformative justice is a new justice approach that looks at wrongdoing as an opportunity to not only address the harm, but the societal oppression rooted in the injustice while fostering community healing through the cultivation practices that prevent future harm and practices for communities to intervene when harm occurs.

Chapter two of this thesis focuses on literature that includes a body of research that demonstrates how queer, trans, Black, Indigenous, people of color (QTBIPOC) communities have been historically oppressed and invisibilized and are using tools to address harm within communities, like social media, a tool being used to callout injustice. The research also points to the need for skill development to address harm and oppression within communities in transformative ways.

### **Methodology**

This thesis is inspired and informed by testimonios (Reyes & Rodriguez, 2012). Testimonios are used to explore ways QTBIPOC individuals have been impacted by social media call outs in addition to community leaders' perception of the use of social media callouts and

how they support QTBIPOC communities in healing cycles of harm. Data collection used the qualitative method of semi-structured interviews. The participants included two QTBIPOC individuals who experienced public call outs on social media and two QTBIPOC community leaders that do work rooted in anti-violence. Interviews were conducted over Zoom. The data collected for this study was coded and themes related to the research questions were established from the coded data. Once the data was collected and analyzed, it was used to understand the impacts of public call outs for QTBIPOC individuals and the transformative methods to hold individuals in a community accountable, while examining the nuances and complexities of the use of public callouts as an accountability tool to address harm within a community that holds multiple marginalized identities. The protection of human subjects included (a) engaging participants in the process of informed consent by clearly sharing the purpose of research, commitment involved to research, risks of research, rewards of research, and ability to withdraw consent at any time without consequences; (b) informing subjects of the study procedures and answering any questions they may have before the interview date; (c) making a plan for and discussing the confidentiality of records and identity with participants, including the use of pseudonyms; (d) the recognition of any potential risk, such as the exposure of their identity with their story and making a plan for minimizing these risks that includes meeting in private, deleting recordings, and using pseudonyms; and (e) identifying and discussing potential benefits, such as the opportunity to highlight and explore the experiences that occur for the QTBIPOC individual who is called out and offer ideas for alternatives to accountability that are more in line with transformative justice.



## **Limitations of the Study**

This study has several limitations including: (a) the timeframe of the study; (b) the sampling procedure and sample size; (c) methods/data collection process; (d) the quantity of the data collected/used in the study; (e) researcher positionality. The timeframe of this study is a limitation because only so much data can be collected in one month. Another limitation can be found in the convenience sample used for this study because not all members of the larger population of the QTBIPOC community were given an opportunity to participate in this study. This necessarily limits the results because there are only accounts from participants who experienced being publicly called out and participants who work with QTBIPOC communities in navigating accountability to analyze. The sample did not include folx who use social media as a tool for public call outs, not because I dismiss their thinking or devalue the harm they experience, but because my focus is on the impact of the call out experience on those who received it. Related to this, the small size of the sample means that the results of this study can not be used to illustrate the impact of public callouts happening within QTBIPOC communities as a whole. Instead, however, the small sample can raise questions about the impacts of callouts which can be investigated further. The methods and data collection procedures for this study also include limitations. Finally, I hold prior experience and consequent beliefs about public social media callouts as a means to hold wrongdoers accountable and this may have limited the data collection and interpretation process because, while I worked to hold both/and experiences of the person called out and the person who employed the callout, I position myself as desiring another means outside of social media callouts to address an injustice within community settings.

## **Significance of the Study**

*“I came to theory because I was hurting—the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing.” ~bell hooks (1994)*

This thesis may be of interest to QTBIPOC communities and individuals, practitioners of accountability processes, and therapists. It is also of deep personal interest to myself. It may hold significance for QTBIPOC communities because this is an experience happening within the community, in which we do not know enough about the impact on those called out and it may not be in service to ending cycles of harm. In addition, this thesis may also interest practitioners of accountability because it provides data on the impact of callout culture within intragroup dynamics through the research’s transformative justice lens. It may also hold significance for therapists who may be working with someone who has been called out by someone in a community they identify with. Finally, this thesis is important to me because “I came to theory because I was hurting” (hooks, 1994, p. 59) and I intend to heal.

## **Researcher Positionality**

I come to this research with my personal experience of being a queer person of color (QPOC) who has been publicly called out on social media for past harm that I have caused. I have approached this research with humility and a fear that I may not hold the both/and, and in doing so, cause further harm to those individuals within the QTBIPOC community who have used social media as a tool to address and bring to light an injustice they were experiencing. At the same time, I hold an acceptance and deep gratitude that I am supported and guided

throughout this process and will be accountable to my intention of holding both/and experiences, despite focusing my research on the impacts of being called out. I interviewed community leaders to learn about transformative justice through their accountability and healing work with QTBIPOC individuals. I also interviewed QTBIPOC individuals who experienced public call outs on social media to learn more about the impacts.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Social media is an empowering tool for queer, trans, Black, Indigenous, people of color (QTBIPOC) communities to use their voice to address injustice(s), and has been used as a tool for accountability amongst and within the QTBIPOC community. However, the community needs to skill up on transformative justice community accountability processes. The scholarship that justifies this claim includes research demonstrating that: (a) QTBIPOC communities are historically oppressed and continue to experience discrimination; (b) marginalized communities use social media as a tool to bring into awareness injustice and harm; and (c) communities need to develop skills to address harm in transformative ways.

#### **Oppression and Discrimination Among QTBIPOC Communities**

Research demonstrates that Queer and Trans, Black, Indigenous, People of Color (QTBIPOC) communities continue to experience oppression and discrimination. This includes (a) a study that illustrates the intersectional microaggressions experienced by LGBT people with multiple oppressed identities (Nadal, 2013), (b) a study that examines the intersection of race and sexual orientation and its connection to discrimination (Whitfield et al., 2014), (c) a study that claims that despite the fact that LGBTQ+ BIPOC are exposed to more discrimination and victimization, LGBTQ+ BIPOC experience little impact on their mental health and wellbeing due to the resilience and coping strategies used to combat prior race-based stress (Singh et al., 2021), and (d) narratives that claim that the erasure of the true history of the United States is done through US policies that hurt marginalized communities and perpetuate the silencing of their voices and erasure of their struggles and joys (Oviatt et al, 2022). These works are important because taken together, they demonstrate that QTBIPOC communities, and their

multiple oppressed identities, have historically and continue to be impacted by institutional and interpersonal violence.

In 2013, Nadal contributed to literature on intersectional microaggressions experienced by LGBT people of color (POC), LGBT people of religious groups, LGBT people with disabilities, and LGBT people of other marginalized identities. Nadal (2013) defines intersectional microaggressions as “those microaggressions that are encountered as a result of one’s intersectional or multiple identities” (p. 110). The literature on intersectional microaggressions experienced by LGBT POC demonstrates that, within LGBT communities, LGBT POC experience objectification, exclusion, exoticization, lack of representation, racism, and denial of racism; and within communities of color, LGBT POC experience exclusion, denial of existence, and family dismissal. Nadal (2013) concludes that further research is needed to examine frequency and distress of LGBT POC experiencing microaggressions and give voice to LGBT youth and LGBT youth of color experiencing microaggressions. This is related to the work of Whitfield et al (2014), where the authors addressed the existing gaps in the literature to understand the impacts of discrimination among LGBT POC.

Similar to the findings of Nadal (2013), Whitfield et al. (2014) addressed the need to advance scholarship that examines the impacts of discrimination for LGBT POC. Whitfield et al. (2014) did this by studying the intersection of sexual orientation and racial/ethnic identity and its correlation to workplace and housing discrimination through analyzing data from “One Colorado Educational Fund’s anonymous 2010 GLB Needs Assessment” (p. 431). Conducted in a Rocky Mountain region state, this study included 3,854 LGBTQ participants. The results of this study demonstrate that LGBT POC experience greater housing and workplace discrimination compared to White LGBT people and there “are nuanced differences among racial groups that

are important to understand” (p. 435). The findings suggest that federal policies that protect LGBT people from discrimination should be implemented in public and private settings, in addition to ongoing training within federal, state, and local housing authorities as well as in the labor sector to reduce anti-LGBTQ discrimination. Whitfield et al. (2014) conclude that further research is needed to (1) examine discrimination among racial/ethnic minorities, (2) explore the role of culture and historical oppression on the willingness for marginalized groups to report discrimination, (3) focus on more complex questions to address the intersectional identities of LGBT individuals, and (4) identify the “different forms in which discrimination can manifest in social settings” (p. 437). This is also related to the work of Singh et al. (2021), where the authors examine the impacts of interlocking oppressions.

Similar to the findings of Nadal (2013) and Whitfield et al. (2014), Singh et al. (2021) addressed LGBTQ+ experiences of discrimination and coping and resilience. Singh et al. (2021) do this by reviewing literature on heteronormativity, intersectionality, and minority stress model. The findings suggest that LGBTQIA+ BIPOC communities experience racialized forms of heteronormativity, discrimination, victimization, distress due to lack of community support, and anticipation of rejection from intra- and inter- groups, creating barriers to accessing social capital which negatively impacts experiencing a sense of belonging and connection to community. While trans and nonbinary (TNB) people experience high rates of negative health and well being and identity-related stigma and victimization, Singh et al. (2021) claims that LGBTQ BIPOC disclose sexual identity at lower rates and show “little to no difference in physical and mental health due to their resilience and coping processes informed by race-based stressed” (p. 123). The authors conclude that more research is needed that centers the experiences of racialized trans-prejudice of TNB BIPOC and the “impacts of discrimination, violence, rejection, and

internalization of LGBTQ+ people" (p. 125). This is related to the work of Oviatt et al. (2022), where the authors challenge normative literacies in classroom settings and claim that normative literacy is a contributor to the erasure of true histories of those most marginalized.

Oviatt et al. (2022) addressed the erasure of the US's true history done through silencing and erasing the struggles and joy of marginalized communities. Oviatt et al. (2022) studied the importance of humanizing marginalized communities by moving past our current era of promoting one story, the dominant narrative, and by sharing multiple queer narratives. This study included three ELA teacher narratives. The results of this study suggests that schools and curricula that perpetuate harmful ideologies, lack representation, and uphold policies that hurt marginalized communities contribute to the erasure, silencing and disempowerment of QTBIPOC communities. Oviatt et al. (2022) imply that schools are places that either perpetuate the cycle of enforcing dominant narratives as the only story or end the cycle of upholding dominant culture by committing to centering diverse voices in the classrooms.

In summary, scholars have demonstrated that Queer and Trans, Black, Indigenous, People of Color (QTBIPOC) communities continue to experience oppression, discrimination, and erasure. When examining the impacts of discrimination and oppression of QTBIPOC, it is imperative to examine all intersecting identities. The interlocking oppressions experienced by QTBIPOC may contribute to the way one copes with and reacts to discrimination and violence. Institutional spaces perpetuate dominant ideology through historical miseducation and lack of representation of QTBIPOC communities. This body of research provides evidence for why queer, trans, Black, Indigenous, people of color (QTBIPOC) communities need to use their voice to address such injustice(s), seek accountability amongst and within the QTBIPOC community. Related to this, through the use of social media, QTBIPOC communities are using their voice to

raise awareness and address the social injustices they experience, a topic that is discussed in the next section.

### **Social Media is a Tool to Bring Awareness of Injustice and Harm**

Research demonstrates that social media is a complex tool for historically marginalized communities to bring awareness to injustices and harm. This includes (a) a study that illustrates the role of radicalism and the means of accountability among queer and trans people of color (QTPOC) in Toronto, Canada (Chin, 2018); (b) a study that articulates that social media callouts are a strategy for minoritized people and groups to address social problems (Clark, 2020); and (c) a study that claims that there is complexity to online cancel culture and a need to understand the standpoints surrounding the practice (Lokhande et al., 2022). Taken together, these studies examine the use of social media callout culture within racialized marginalized communities, both being a tool to name injustices and also a tool that has the potential to replicate harmful punitive tactics.

In 2018, Chin examined the role of radicalism and moral evaluation in anti-oppression politics and callout culture within queer and trans people of color (QTPOC) communities. Chin conducted interviews with QTPOC arts organizers and artists in Toronto, Canada, which gave insight into dynamics of conflict within QTPOC communities. The findings of this study demonstrate that those who are insufficiently radical in the QTPOC community are subject to disposability and exclusion through public callouts. Chin concludes that call-out culture as an enactment of anti-oppression and radical politics among QTPOC communities produces dehumanizing lateral violence that perpetuate the cycles of violence and brings about fear and shame. This is related to the work of Clark (2020) who claims that the phenomena of social media callout and cancel culture originated in QTBIPOC communities.



Similar to the findings of Chin (2018), Clark (2020) argues that digital accountability performed by Black Twitter and social media callouts are a strategy for minoritized people and groups to address social problems. Clark (2020) illustrates how the social media callout strategy is being challenged by the dominant culture's narrative of being canceled and its potential to negatively impact the public sphere that has historically been controlled and operated by those in power. Clark implies that calling out systemic inequities, what the elite have misappropriated to canceling, is a digital discursive accountability praxis, where social media platforms allow for discourse outside of the view of the mainstream, dominant gaze and calls those in power to be accountable as a response to the weight of oppression. This is also related to the work of Lokhande et al., (2022) who examines the terminology used within the phenomenon of callout and cancel culture.

In contrast to the findings of Chin (2018) and Clark (2020), Lokhande et al. (2022) addressed the need to define the term cancel culture and examine its history. Lokhande et al. (2022) studied to understand and define the complexities of cancel culture in the context of India. This study included interviews of experts in the fields of media and film studies, psychology and political science as well as secondary data analysis. The findings of this study demonstrate that social media is a place for minoritized people to exercise free speech, but should not be a standalone resistance tool to address injustice as cancel culture is a hazy subject. Lokhande et al. (2022) conclude that in order to understand social media callout culture we need to examine why people engage in it.

In summary, research demonstrates that social media is a complex tool to call out social injustice and harm. While social media is a tool that can be used, and is being used by QTBIPOC communities, in strategic ways to bring attention to an injustice, it is being challenged by

dominant culture, those who have controlled public spaces. There is also a call to examine when it is the only tool used to address a social injustice. Taken together, this body of research justifies that social media is a place for QTBIPOC communities to exercise free speech and address harm and injustice. However, it illustrates an important division in the literature that reflects that marginalized groups have been using social media platforms to call out injustice rooted in power and privilege, but further study is needed to understand the use of social media callouts used in intragroup conflicts. Related to this is the need for skill development to address harm and oppression within communities in transformative ways.

### **Need for Community Skill Development to Address Harm in Transformative Ways**

Research demonstrates that communities lack the skills to address harm and oppression in transformative ways. This includes (a) a study that illustrates how communities collectively lack the skills needed to address everyday harm and oppression that do not rely on policing, punishment, and shaming (Fuller et al., 2016); (b) literature that examines how the use of cancel and call out culture as a tool can be used for survival and to cause further harm (brown 2020); (c) a study that articulates the need to replace and challenge punitive logic in our daily life (Lamble, 2022); and (d) a study that claims that there is a difference between the western worldview and indigenous worldview on addressing conflict and disharmony (McCaslin, 2022). Taken together, these studies demonstrate that social media is an empowering tool for queer, trans, Black, Indigenous, people of color (QTBIPOC) communities to use their voice to address injustice(s), and has been used as a tool for accountability amongst and within the QTBIPOC community. However, there is a need to skill up the community on transformative justice community accountability processes.

In 2016, Fuller et al. addressed that communities collectively lack the skills needed to address everyday harm and oppression in transformative ways that do not rely on policing, punishment, and shaming. Fuller et al. did this by (1) sharing classroom pedagogy and strategy sessions for teaching skills to students on college campuses on how to collectively respond to violence in transformative ways and (2) exploring the possibilities and difficulties of implementing this pedagogy. The participants and setting include college students in women and gender studies classrooms. The results of this study demonstrate that community accountability depends on community investment. The strategy sessions focused only on interpersonal violence and did not focus on larger-scale community responses to state violence. They share organizations doing the work to respond to state violence with their students and encourage them to get involved in the organizations' community organizing efforts. Fuller et al. conclude that the classroom pedagogy implemented, both learning and practicing, is part of the ongoing work to grow community skills in responding to violence in transformative ways.

Similar to the findings of Fuller et al. (2016), brown (2020) addressed the current phenomenon and struggle with call out culture. brown (2020) claims that our movements do not know how to engage with conflict or move towards accountability in principled and transformative ways and are practicing punitive culture publicly due to social media. brown (2020) addresses the difference between "knee-jerk callouts" (p. 40), call outs that are used to shame, humiliate, and cause social destruction in response to a misunderstanding, conflict, or mistake, and "necessary survival technologies" (p. 45), a public call out used as a means for the immediate harm to stop in cases of rape, sexual assault, and physical abuse. brown (2020) concludes that we need to develop our "analysis of abolition and dismantling systems of oppression" (p.44), our discernment and curiosity, our ability to see the difference between the

human and the behavior, our skills in facilitation and mediation, and our ability to hold complexity and accountability, while also unlearning binary thinking.

Similar to the findings of Fuller et al. (2016) and brown (2020) Lamble (2022) addressed the need to replace and challenge punitive logic in our daily life with other systems that address violence and harm. Lamble illustrates that punishment has been equated to justice, despite the fact that punishment perpetuates cycles of violence. The findings of this study demonstrate that we need to foster and cultivate accountability practices that do not resemble punitive systems that perpetuate cycles of harm and violence, which we have internalized as norm. Lamble implies that cancel culture and online public shaming are punitive tactics to address injustice and that there is a need to teach the community how to effectively respond to harm and crisis in the community without relying on the punitive justice system.

An addition to the findings of Fuller et al. (2016), brown (2020), and Lamble (2022), McCaslin (2022) addressed the difference between dominant western worldview approaches and indigenous worldview approaches with addressing conflict and harm within communities, where western worldviews prioritize individualism, a hierarchy of value of people, and punishment and indigenous worldviews prioritize healing, connection, and regenerative trust. McCaslin (2022) illustrates that community pressure does play a role in accountability within indigenous worldviews, but sharing is not the essence of the healing process, and force and coercion contribute to disharmony. McCaslin (2022) concludes that indigenous traditions acknowledge not just the offender to blame for the harm, expanding the circle of blame and benefit, but also understand that the community is involved in the injustice or conflict and put the perpetrator on equal footing with others.

In summary, research demonstrates that communities lack the skills to address harm and oppression in transformative ways. This gap in our collective toolbox to transform ourselves and each other, is an opportunity to develop skills that are not punitive by nature. Western culture has been indoctrinated for generations to respond to violence with violence and while communities do not want to rely on policing, retributive tactics are second nature, whereas transformative justice is a newer approach to addressing wrongdoing and communities are just being introduced to the processes. Taken together, this body of research justifies that community accountability processes oriented in transformative justice are new for QTBIPOC communities, who use social media as a tool to call out injustice and need to develop skills to use tools to address root causes and move away from punitive tactics.

### **Summary**

This literature review has examined bodies of literature making the claim that QTBIPOC communities are historically erased and oppressed. As a result, QTBIPOC communities create and claim spaces for them to exist freely and authentically, as a form of their resistance, resilience, and liberation. It also looked at literature that made the claim that social media is an empowering tool for queer, trans, Black, Indigenous, people of color (QTBIPOC) communities to use their voice to address injustice(s), and has been used by as a tool to callout on the intragroup level. It has also looked at literature that makes the case for the need for communities to develop skills on transformative justice accountability processes. This literature review provides a rationale for understanding why it is important to explore the experiences of QTBIPOC individuals who get called out on social media by other QTBIPOC individuals, in order to examine the nuances and complexities of the use of public callouts as an accountability tool to address harm within a community that holds multiple marginalized identities. Historically

oppressed communities are those most impacted by violence and the punitive justice system and there is a need to address violence within communities in ways that do not mimic the retributive justice system. Transformative justice (TJ) provides an opportunity for communities to authentically reach a place of repair when there has been rupture. TJ also examines the systems and root causes of that harm as a means to end the cycles of violence from recurring in the community, considering the future of the community.

## **CHAPTER III FINDINGS**

### **Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the findings of the common themes and learnings that are shared among QTBIPOC individuals who have been publicly called out on social media and QTBIPOC practitioners of community accountability and transformative justice. The four testimonies have similar themes that emerge around community accountability, the impacts of call out culture, and transformative justice. I wanted to gain insight into the impact experienced by QTBIPOC individuals and was interested in speaking with folx who were willing to share their testimonio around what may be considered an experience that may bring up discomfort. I had no prior relationships with the participants whom I interviewed. I was also interested in hearing from the perspective of leaders and practitioners of community accountability and transformative justice who have experience supporting individuals who have experienced being called out publicly.

### **Testimonio Profiles**

I give thanks to the participants, all of whom identify as QTBIPOC and are based in the United States, for the time spent recalling experiences and sharing information of a time that they either experienced or supported navigating a situation where pain, confusion, and isolation were present. I spent 60-90 minutes conducting separate semi-structured interviews with each individual over Zoom. I was fortunate to speak to two individuals, Alex and Andie, who shared their experiences being publicly called out on social media and its immediate and lasting impacts. I also connected with two community leaders, Sasha and Harper, who shared their experiences supporting QTBIPOC individuals and communities navigate accountability through a transformative justice approach.

<b>Table 1: Participant Information</b>						
Pseudonym	Age	SOGIE	Pronouns	Race/Ethnic Identity	Year of call out	Location of call out
Alex	35	Non-binary of the transmasculine experience	he/they, they/he	Boricua, Afrodescendente	2017 - 2018	Metropolitan city on the east coast
Andie	38	Non-binary, queer	they/them/theirs	South African American	2015	Metropolitan city on the west coast
Sasha	42	Cis-woman	she/her/hers	Dominican, Black	n/a	n/a
Harper	39	Woman, femme	she/her/hers	Mixed race, Mexican and Irish	n/a	n/a

### **Alex**

Alex is a 35 year old non-binary person of transmasculine experience. He identifies as Puerto Rican and Afrodescendente. Some days he considers himself part of the QTBIPOC community and other days he is not sure if he belongs. He recently moved from a metropolitan city on the east coast of the US to a city in California. When asked to share about his experience being called out he contextualized what was going on for him personally, what was going on locally in the city he was residing and working in at that time, and what was going on politically in the United States before sharing what the call out was and its impact. He was publicly called out between 2017 to 2018 by another member of the QTBIPOC community who made indirect comments around a decision he made as a leader in an organization that served the LGBTQ+ community. The indirect comments published on Facebook never named Alex directly in the call out. Alex made the choice to not respond to the call outs on Facebook because his preoccupations were in trying to continue cultivating what the organization served. In this



chapter of his life, Alex does not have community in his current location and realized that his life took a complete 180 degree shift.

*Who am I going to be without this pain without this history without this trauma? How am I actually going to build relationships and be in community with people when so much of the hurt came from the community of which I'm wanting to love so fiercely? How do I hold those sort of complicated feelings?*

### **Andie**

Andie is a 38 year old non-binary, Black, queer, South African American. They identify as being a part of the QTBIPOC community. In 2015, Andie was called out by a group of folks on Facebook related to a workshop they facilitated at a conference, where the call out named that they stole the ideas and content from other organizers. The person who called them out directly identifies as being part of the QTBIPOC community and has very deep ties in the city where Andie works and organizes. Before the call out Andie was on a journey around their identity, their Blackness, and their queerness. They were also doing work on finding community where they were located.

*There were a lot of internal things going on in terms of making sure I felt like I was belonging. I was on this journey around my relationship around my identity, around my Blackness. For it to happen in a public forum on Facebook, right after we had done this workshop, which I felt very proud of, and this person was also highly regarded in the organizing community, just felt pretty bad and horrible.*

### **Sasha**

Sasha is a 42 year old cis woman who identifies racially as Black, as Dominican, as QTBIPOC and who was born and raised in the US. She founded an organization that holds collective accountability, healing and growth spaces for people who have been impacted by violence, as enablers, as survivors, and as enactors. She considers the organization an abolitionist project, a healing justice project, along with being a transformative justice project. Her

organization's work invites folx to explore and invite some curiosity around how the violent systems have found their ways into their bodies and how they are externalized, through our thinking, the way that we relate to ourselves, the way that we relate to others, and the way that we relate to community. It is a space for folx that want to address some of these issues in a safe space without fear of being reported, without fear of confidentiality being broken, and a space where people can engage in the kind of healing work that they need in collaboration with other folx. Those that are leading the space in her organization are also people that identify as people that have caused harm and been impacted by violence. The majority of the facilitators were prior participants of the work. They hold space for communities, collectives, and organizations that serve and in some ways impact BIPOC folks, who have experienced harm inside of their spaces and provide an opportunity for organizations to engage in some repair work that gets at the culture of the organization or the collective that culminated in that event. They hold capacity building workshops for organizations to be able to have the tools that they need in order to do a transformative justice process and a circle process.

*So we have a space for individuals. We have work to help and support individuals. Then we have repair work to help support those institutions and collectives that impact the material lives of those individuals.*

### **Harper**

Harper is a 39 year old woman and femme who is mixed race light skin Latina, Mexican and Irish. She identifies as QTBIPOC. She got into the work of transformative justice by being a survivor herself. She was in an abusive relationship with another mixed and light skin Latino, queer person. Her transformative justice work originated when that relationship ended and became untenable to the point where they could no longer share space together in QTBIPOC community. She entered this work because she was trying to figure out accountability through a

transformative justice approach and tried many things to try and co-exist with her ex in the same small community, but none of the things worked. Her solution to navigating that situation was to move out of the small community and town. She moved to a new state because she was not able to figure out how to safely coexist with her ex inside their same small community. For the last 16 years, Harper has been trying to answer the questions, “What would have worked for me? What else could have been possible?” When Harper moved she began doing direct service work with youth and adult QTBIPOC survivors of abuse. After 10 years of direct service work supporting survivors of abuse, she continued the work outside of nonprofits, informally. Most of her work today is supporting people who caused harm, most of whom are trans folks of color who caused harm in a romantic relationship. She is helping them to apply accountability skills by trying to figure it out together.

*The thing about accountability is it's one of those words that people use a lot and actually, people really struggle to define what they mean. And it often means really different things to people. In that definition, it's all about, what are you doing to be responsible for your choices and their impacts? I really focus on the part of accountability that is about getting ourselves aligned, attending to our own, what did I do? Was it aligned? What am I doing every day in the world? Is it aligned with my values of who I want to be, my vision of who I am, what's important to me and who I want to be in the world? When we're doing actions that are not aligned with who we want to be or what we value, what are we going to do about it?*

### **Findings: QTBIPOC Public Call Out Experiences, Impact, and Learnings**

The public call out experiences of the participants in this study can be found in Table 2. The findings reveal that QT and BIPOC communities that the participants engaged in community and movement work were described as small. Participants experienced rupture in their respective communities unrelated to the call out before they were called out, were called out by a member of the QTBIPOC community without an opportunity to have a conversation before the call out, and during a time they were navigating socio-political events. Both participants who experienced

public call outs on Facebook voiced that the call out did not show the full context of the experience, they did not receive support navigating the call out prior, and, overall, experienced accountability as a form of punishment. While the participants had common elements of their callout experiences, each one had unique elements of their callout experience as well. My conversations with the participants who work in transformative justice, Sasha and Harper, shared their experiences working with individuals and communities that connect with the common experiences both Alex and Andie named.

The impacts that Alex and Andie experienced as a result of their respective public call outs can be found in Table 3. The findings reveal that the impacts can be grouped under three headings: emotional impacts, relational impacts, and psychological impacts. The impacts section focuses on the voices of Alex and Andie who recalled a time that brought pain to their lives. The voices of Sasha and Harper are brought in to further emphasize the impact by revealing antidotes that are not accessed because of a lack of knowledge and to reveal that the impact goes beyond the individual level and into the community at large.

Throughout my conversations with both Alex and Andie, while their experiences brought up discomfort, their energy in retelling their experiences were rooted in humility. They both demonstrated compassion, understanding, and love for the community in which they were called out. They were able to share their stories of discomfort and pain, while also sharing what they learned from this experience. Opposite from the experience and impacts sections that highlight common themes, their learnings are unique and can be found in Table 4.

### **Experiences**

The common themes that emerged in the call out experiences of both Alex and Andie were that they were a part of or felt like the community they were a part of was small, they

experienced rupture within the community unrelated to the call out beforehand, they desired for a conversation to have taken place in lieu of being called out, and experienced the call out as a punitive form of accountability while not receiving support navigating the callout after the fact. Community leaders, Sasha and Harper, share their perspectives from working with communities and individuals as well as their personal experiences around these themes.

<b>Table 2: Common/Similar experiences</b>					
Pseudonym	Small Community	Rupture in community before call out	No conversation before the call out	Experienced accountability as a form of punishment	No support navigating the call out
Alex	X	X	X	X	X
Andie	X	X	X	X	X

### **Small Community**

A common theme that emerged in the testimonios of all participants was that QTBIPOC, LGBTQ+, and BIPOC spaces can be small in size and in felt sense. This is because there are not many spaces that exclusively center historically marginalized communities. When sharing about his experience growing up in a small town in Florida, Alex shares that at the age of 17 he would carpool for over two hours to sneak into Pulse, an LGBTQ+ club as a way for him to find his community.

*I was sneaking into the clubs when I was like 17 because I hated Florida and I think there's a similar trajectory for a lot of queer folks and a lot of queer Black and Brown folks finding their community first in club spaces. I was that kid. By the time I turned 18 my entire senior year I was going to Pulse. Pulse was my safe haven.*

Alex describes Pulse as his safe haven which also served as his gateway to finding queer community. Seeking community within QTBIPOC spaces aligns with the research that

QTBIPOC folx experience exclusion, denial of existence, dismissal, objectification, exoticization, lack of representation, racism, and denial of racism (Nadal, 2013). While clubs and bars have historically been spaces for queer folx to gather with each other, when I was in discussion with Sasha about clubs and bars being one of the primary spaces for queer communities to convene, she raised questions around the upliftment of the dynamics that happen in club spaces and wondered what and who is seen and unseen in these spaces.

*What gets uplifted and upheld, what gets celebrated, what gets noted if the focus is the dynamics that happen in clubs and bars? Because that's been a lot of my experience. Where in that is there space for the space holders to be really seen and felt, you know?*

Sasha's inquiry around what is seen and felt in club and bar spaces, not only emphasizes the point that queer spaces are limiting, but also uplifts that within these particular spaces, the community may not learn about the gifts and contributions of each individual member, such as community healers and space holders, because this space and dynamic is grounded in its own purpose and motivations.

Andie was a part of the Black organizing space in their community. Despite organizing in a large city, Andie felt that their Black organizing community was small. Given that the person who called them out was well connected in their organizing community, Andie experienced relational and spatial impacts after the call out.

*And again, because I think Black organizing in [my city] at the time was just so small, all the spaces that I ended up going to were connected to this person, had talked to this person, or at least that's what it felt like.*

Harper compares marginalized groups with those who have systemic and structural power and privilege, naming that marginalized groups experience limited spaces while there is an abundance of spaces that center those closest to power and privilege.

*Like there are plenty of straight white people who can move all over and could just literally abandon a community and move to the next place and for QTBIPOC folks, that's just actually not possible. We kind of have to deal with each other again. You might be*

*able to find a corner you could kind of hang out in, but it's not a metaphor to say that our safety is a real question. Who is actually literally keeping our bodies safe? Sometimes our own communities. And so the question is actually very urgent and real. The cost of opting out or the cost of saying, Okay, well, I guess those communities aren't available to me anymore, is legitimately very high. It's not sort of made up fears, it's a real fear.*

Harper acknowledges the urgency and real need for QTBIPOC folx to be a part of community spaces rather than banished from their communities because there are limited safe spaces afforded to folx who have intersectional marginalized lived experiences. These limited spaces may raise fears if one is no longer given access to them. She also uses the analogy of dog packs to describe community and how getting kicked out of your pack can activate a trauma response.

*Historically, banishing people has been an effective punishment skill, because it literally is a life or death question. And actually, just from a trauma, brain perspective, things happen in our body when your pack kicks you out, it is a life or death question. And so our brains feel like it is life or death, even if it's in our current world and society. Or it may or may not be an immediate life or death question, but it feels life or death to people to be kicked out from your people. Or to be told you don't get to be part of your people anymore. That actually activates trauma responses in people that are very real.*

Marginalized communities create and gather in exclusive spaces that are not always granted by dominant culture. Queer folx travel distances to find their community, be amongst other queer folx and to receive all the medicine, safety, and life offered through being in community with each other. This intimacy can be described as magic, a miracle, as sacred, a safe haven, and as necessary for survival. However, these spaces are not without struggle.

### **Rupture in community before the call out**

Conflicts, mistakes, harm, abuse, and violence occur within QTBIPOC spaces, some of which get addressed, some of which do not. In my conversations with Alex and Andie, I learned about incidents that were brought to a public call out, while also learning that there was an

existing rupture in their respective communities unrelated to what they were publicly called out for and this context was not included in the call out message.

Alex joined his nonprofit community as executive director, a few years after the former executive director of the organization, who was a major civil and human rights pioneer and organizing mentor to Alex, passed away.

*I always talk to my homies that I feel like when she passed away in 2014 I think it really caused a rupture within the larger QTPOC community in [the city], because she was somebody that was just really brilliant and understanding of how to be in community with people. She also knew how to use this sort of tool to “call out” these kinds of structural changes that we were seeking and also how to be strategic when you are within the belly of the beast. I feel like when she passed away the net that had held the community just completely snapped.*

Alex joined his organization during the 2016 presidential election and due to what was happening in the socio-political landscape, he experienced this time as a time where the queer community was in a heightened state of coexistence, engaging with each other in toxic and vitriolic ways.

*We’re going to talk shit on the internet, we’re just gonna blast and that’s it and that’s all we’re gonna fucking do. We don’t care if it’s true we don’t care if it’s rumor we don’t even care about the implications of what this call out on this public platform is going to look like we don’t give a fuck we’re just going to do this.*

Similar to Alex, Andie experienced a rupture within the community they were joining. The organizing community directed a lot of their efforts to addressing the injustices that Black people experience in America, particularly the deaths of Black people at the hands of police officers. Internally, during organizing meetings, Andie noticed that Black queer trans folx were not being uplifted in these spaces and felt a division due to this.

*And so in that process, there were just a lot of like Black folks that were coming together. But internally in the meeting, once the meetings started to get a little bit more structured there wasn’t as much intentionality around queer and trans Black folks. And so that’s where it kind of started to feel a little bit divided. I think, for some folks, myself included really wanting to make sure like Black and queer trans folks were being uplifted.*



Andie and a group of folx split into their own sub-group to focus their direct action efforts on the needs of Black and Queer Trans folx. This separation created a tension that was never directly addressed and which Andie felt may have been a resentment that was held on to by the other group of folx until the moment they led their workshop at the conference and were publicly called out.

*So I think as a result I felt like this tension, almost in a weird way, this competition around who can do the best action or who could be the most supportive.*

The tensions and rupture that Alex and Andie shared, existed in their communities prior to being explicitly called out, and while those prior dynamics may or may not have contributed to the call out, the prior tensions were not named explicitly in their respective public call outs.

While in discussion with both community leaders, Sasha and Harper, a theme that emerged was that folx who commit and cause harm live within our community and as Sasha shared, “Everyone really has a capacity to cause harm because we live in a violent system.”

Harper names that people who cause harm live in, amongst, and are a part of our communities.

*There is no Batterers Island, there's no place where we send people who cause harm, to go live on their separate island, like they are going to exist. And actually, they get to live because they're people, like they actually do get to live, and they get to exist. Because that's such a painful question to turn towards we haven't really turned towards it as a community.*

If folx who cause harm exist in communities, if folx who do not have the tools to navigate conflict exist in communities, if folx who have experienced trauma exists within communities, if abusive coping mechanisms exist within communities, it is no wonder rupture exists within communities. Individuals within communities are interacting with each other daily, without knowing the full picture. Communities that are not addressing ruptures through a transformative justice approach are inevitably in a cycle of community harm that may not be

nurturing a foundation that supports community healing. Communities that are surviving are not thriving.

### **No conversation before the call out**

Both Alex and Andie did not engage in conversations with the folx who called them out prior to the call out on Facebook and expressed a curiosity around taking that approach. Having a conversation before the call out seemed to be a reasonable possibility by both participants given their prior relationship and work within the community spaces they were part of.

As the newly appointed executive director of a community organization, Alex focused his efforts on meeting the needs of the community. When he was indirectly called out on Facebook for making organizational structural changes and for firing an employee, who identifies as Black trans-femme, he felt a tension between the call out tool being used against him and his efforts as a leader within the community. Despite this tension, Alex held an understanding of why folx engaged in using the tool.

*I'm not mad at folks for using this cancel culture tool because I think people that are surviving and people who have historically and systemically been oppressed, we use what we can in our tools of disposal to I think be alive in that second and in that moment and sometimes being alive in that second in that moment is what is this one action I can do right now. I think what this shows me is we actually don't know how to be in community with each other.*

While Alex understands the why behind the use of the tool, he admits that it reveals to him that there is a need to learn how to be in community. He entered the role of executive director because there was a need and the staff community made direct action to bring him along. Alex shares that some of this context gets lost in the call out, where a single narrative is what gets shared.

*All that's seen on the call out is the specific narrative which is untrue and just false. There's no basis for the call out, there's not a let's have a conversation, let's discuss, let's do this. There's no next steps or actions so then I'm like what the fuck is the purpose?*

Similar to Alex, while conscious that they activated the other group before the call out, Andie wondered about a process where the group who called them out picked up the phone and connected interpersonally rather than going directly to Facebook to call them out.

*There could have been other ways to pull us in and tell us, Yo, you stole our work, as opposed to going through a very public format. And if anything with these folks in particular, they had my number.*

The folx who called out Andie were in community with them before the group split into separate focus areas. The individuals who engaged in the call out had Andie's number and the number of the other folx who co-facilitated the workshop with Andie at the conference. Andie's curiosity around the process had they picked up the phone to check-in instead of taking the route of publicly calling out demonstrates a clear divide within both groups. There may have been differing needs and values amongst the group who called out and the group being called out. In addition, Andie questioned the legitimacy of what was being communicated in the call out.

*I think, gradually, it just kind of felt like there was this heaviness of this disappointment around why us? Why this platform? What are they trying to do? I think there were also questions, at least for me, around, Is this even true? Is this valid, like who are you to say that you "own this content" when direct action organizing is a principle, a framework that everyone who has experience, has done? So there is a lot of questioning about validity around ownership and around relationships too because I think at the core, our relationship had just been fractured, leading up to the call out and this just deepened the fracture.*

Both Alex and Andie speak of a desire to have a conversation before being called out because they were in community with these individuals. Alex said that he felt that the folx who called him out forgot who he was and Andie stated that the folx who called them out had their number. Whether they held a leadership role or were just joining their community, both Alex and Andie did work to uplift and support their respective communities and really would have welcomed and wanted an interpersonal conversation.

The concept and practice of reciprocal curiosity in interpersonal dynamics was explored in my conversation with Sasha. Sasha shares that there are times that people who are publicly called out respond from a place of trauma and are either over or under accountable, responding from a place of trauma, “some that might look like fawning and inflicting harm.” Sasha claims that responding from this place does not create capacity for growth and health.

*[Responding from a place of trauma] is reinscribing this idea that I'm bad, and I don't have capacity to be better, I don't have what it takes or what I need to grow and so my role is to just take these hits, and just comply, comply, comply. But really, it's inscribing a story of harm, not just for the self, but also for the community or the individual that is constantly, throwing shots and projecting and also not practicing curiosity.*

In her work and in her personal experience, Sasha sees this pattern in folks “gripping to this identity of being a survivor.” While this may have been necessary to validate real experiences of harm, Sasha claims that it personally kept her from growing and she sees how holding onto this identity contributed to the environment that created the harm. In our conversation, Sasha encouraged folks and herself to practice curiosity, even more so when toxic dynamics, not toxic people, exists, because she claims that curiosity is at the heart of accountability.

In my conversation with Harper, she emphasizes that, “what the harm is matters and not all harm is the same. Not all harm [has] the same impact.” Given that harm is not a monolith, Harper points out that there is nuance in addressing harm, engaging in accountability is complex, and social media may not be the appropriate means to explore accountability.

*Social media is meant for sound bites, it's meant for quick things, it's meant to get a broad concept out, it's not meant for depth. And it's not meant for nuance. That is not what happens there.*

Expanding further on Alex's and Andie's points of understanding why the call out tool was used against them by folx within their communities, Harper elaborates on the reason marginalized people use this tool.

*When communities are in a position where they do not have access to a lot of institutional power, there are some very predictable ways that people can get to access support, get to access visibility, get to feel attended to or to feel seen. Bringing things into the public sphere is one way that people who don't have a lot of institutional power can get their needs met. And it's actually pretty effective, which is why I think people do it so much.*

While Harper claims that the call out tool has proven to be effective in garnering support, visibility, and feeling attended to and seen, she claims that social media is not meant for nuance and complexity. She proposes a theory of change.

*The theory of change is that if we all started with our own self accountability work, so collectively if we each got better at looking at ourselves, starting with our own behavior, getting clear about where we were wrong, that we all collectively built that skill, we would actually start changing the conditions that lead to violence in other ways.*

Both Sasha and Harper name the need for individuals to engage in self awareness, curiosity, and self accountability. Without these practices, both harm doing and the punishment of harm doers becomes possible under the social conditioning encouraged through the existing systems of domination and control.

### **Accountability as a form of punishment**

The participants pointed out that we live in a society that promotes punitive worldviews. Ideology and behaviors that are uplifted in macrosystems, like the prison industrial complex and the education system, trickle into family systems, where communities remain in cycles of binary thinking, good vs. bad, learning that what is deemed “bad” warrants punishment.

Alex claims that we are not able to move past these learned behaviors because we as a community are not able to engage in conflict with one another.

*I think we are at a place in time where while we are simultaneously organizing for our lives we cannot imagine building better worlds or new futures when we don't even know how to be in conflict with each other and how to be in conflict with each other that isn't for the pure purpose for our destruction because all we're doing then is mirroring the same fucking systems that we say that we want to be liberated from.*

When reflecting on his call out experience and the call outs that he has witnessed, he felt that it did not need to happen in the space of social media. Alex shared that “people have forgotten the power in picking up the phone or arranging to meet.” He believes that people are “forgetting the healing power of one conversation” and believes call outs that did not need to happen publicly could have been rectified by connecting directly with the person.

*I think probably part of what led to my own conflict with my situation was nobody came to me. It was so fucking weird because I'm like do y'all know me and that's what I hate about it. It didn't feel restorative for me.*

In my conversation with Andie, Andie connected the process of accountability with punishment.

*It just felt, for me, a toxic way to experience I guess, accountability, and I feel like at the time, too, a lot of folks were naming accountability as a way of punishment, and not necessarily as a way of using learned lessons to make sure actions are not repeated again.*

Harper has noticed that call outs tend to involve shaming and the performance of clear requests, that are not always as clear or possible as the call out may make it seem. She claims that a lot of times for folx who have experienced real harm, it is not super clear how they could get cared for and feel attended to and oftentimes engage in public call outs close to the harm, when things are really raw. Folx engage in public call outs because their needs are not being met, do not entirely know what would help them feel better, and are communicating their requests from that place of not knowing entirely. Harper elaborates on the unintentional correlation between accountability and feeling good.

*Unfortunately, there may or may not be a correlation between accountability and feeling better. Someone could have done all the things to attend to their harm, and you might still feel like shit. Sometimes it really is healing for people, sometimes it really attends to things. And sometimes the person who caused you harm could do every right kind of action of accountability. And it might not make you feel better.*

She also discourages the survivors that she works with from using social media to try and get their needs met through a public call out because it is rare to achieve meaningful accountability this way.

*I have a strong opinion that rarely do I ever see what I would define as accountability happen because of a public call out. Other things might happen, people might get apologies, people might get financial compensation and people might get some things from those. But meaningful accountability, I think, is very hard to achieve in a public sphere with a lot of eyes on something, especially very close to the flashpoint of the situation.*

Sasha defines accountability as acknowledging the impact that one has in relationships with self and others, developing awareness, being able to take in feedback, and having an openness to critique while still inviting compassion for self and others. She shares that different communities and different relationships require differentiation when it comes to accountability, which she considers as ongoing work.

*I believe that growth and healing is not just one place of arrival, but it's always just constantly being curious and constantly practicing and trying to find out well, what does it look like to be in right relationship to self to others and to community? Yeah, it's not just like this one thing that you do, and that's it, you're good, you're done. But you're constantly, you know, doing the work of growing.*

In Sasha's work with individuals who have been publicly called out, she has noticed that the shame from the public call out often becomes enmeshed with the behavior that led to the call out and as a result folx who have been called out develop an understanding that the accountability work is punishment, which does not align with the principles of transformative justice.

*One big pattern that I do see is an uncoupling of the harm and the shame of the call out and the healing and growth work that an individual walks into. Sometimes the two become so enmeshed. I'm doing this work because I'm bad and this is my punishment, even if they're not saying the words, that's kind of the energy in which folks show up. It becomes really hard for folks to walk into radical honesty about, well, this is what I was feeling. I was afraid, you know, it's hard to access those places, because a lot of times folks are saying, well, do I even have the right to be afraid? Do I even have the right, in any way, to express weakness when I was the one that was causing harm and so like a person's own humanity gets taken away when the two become enmeshed.*

Call outs can be and feel punitive and like a tool that pushes people further away from each other. Call outs happen because a need is not being met. However, we learn from situations like Alex's and Andie's, that there are situations where a conversation could have taken the place of a public call out, yet did not take place. We learn from Sasha and Harper that it is rare that meaningful accountability takes place because of a call out because the shame associated with the call out gets enmeshed with the behavior that led to the call out and the person called out is operating from a trauma response. If a call out does happen within QTBIPOC communities, there is a need for the person who was called out to be supported by a skilled community member so that there is meaningful accountability where growth and healing become possible.

### **No support navigating the call out**

While both Alex and Andie did not receive a conversation before the call out and wondered about the possibilities if that approach was taken, they both received no support after they were called out. Alex experienced the call out as information that became public and there was no restorative interaction with him regarding the call out, which contributed to him feeling lost.

*I never had those restoratively just conversations with communities. That just existed out there and I got to a point where I felt like I lost my goddamn mind.*



In the immediate moment of reading the public call out, Andie was supported by friends. However, they share the experience of Alex, where they did not receive support navigating the call out in a transformative way.

*In terms of attempts to navigate through that call out, no, I didn't feel supported in that [way]. And I think, what support would have looked like at that time was. And it's funny, because now I feel like the words in terms of the practices that are used are like, a transformative justice circle process, something around like conflict resolution, or something like that would have been amazing. But at that time, yeah, that wasn't available. And I don't think I would have necessarily known to go through that route, as an option.*

Andie shares that they would have desired a transformative justice circle process, but also acknowledges that they would not have known, at that time, how to go about receiving this. This becomes even more salient because Andie attempted to connect with a mentor-like figure who has experience in navigating conflict within the Black organizing community after they were called out and learned that she was not available and “she kind of just ghosted.”

In my conversation with Sasha, I learned about the need to develop space holders in the community who would be the folx who can support others navigating rupture, conflict, and accountability.

*If more people did the work of practicing that curiosity for themselves, then I think that creates more capacity for people to become space holders of others who are still working to step into that. I think the more people that are trained in space holding around harm repair, the more these avenues will become available, and that can look different for each community, but I think one thing that is super essential is for somebody to know somebody that they trust, to hold space.*

Harper has been witness to a shift of how communities are becoming curious and engaging in more self-accountability. She believes that this is what's leading more people to have friends who are skilled to support when harm has occurred. Harper claims that folx who have

enacted harmful behaviors feel a lot of shame and may hide it or not receive meaningful support from people because they have been ostracized from their community.

*Accountability work is not easy and so you're gonna need a lot of help from your people to reflect back to you, like hey, here's what's going on and we love you and we don't love the way you acted and we're going to help you. What I have seen for many decades is that people have not known skillful people who actually could help them be accountable, they had to figure it out alone, or with mental health professionals or people who may or may not be values aligned. I do see more people who have skillful community members who can actually support them in their accountability process and I think that's helping.*

Being called out on a social platform makes information public and open to interpretation, largely because the full picture is not conveyed, and especially not the perspective of the person being called out. Call outs on social media platforms occur close to the moment of the incident and do not involve consent from parties being named in the call out. Individuals that are called out are impacted and need support. There are impacts to being named in a call out without prior attempts to address interpersonally, within small communities. There is a need to navigate this time with support from skilled transformative justice space holders. Accountability work is nuanced and becomes more complex when the community you were a part of makes the choice to publicly shame you rather than connect with you individually; when a “knee-jerk call out” is employed as opposed to a “necessary survival technology” (brown, 2020). It is becoming more common that individuals within communities are developing skills to support their peers who have committed harm and who have been called out for it, but they are not always known within communities or not always available to support. Therefore, more often than not, folx who have been called out are navigating the call out and accountability process alone and without support during a time that can be very confusing and activating trauma responses.

## Impacts

There are direct and indirect impacts and effects to the actions we all engage in. Intention does not equal impact, meaning, every individual is navigating life through their own set of experiences and lens and despite the intention behind anyone's words and/or behaviors there will be unique impact(s) for every individual. The common themes of the impacts among the participants who experienced public call outs can be found on Table 3. The common themes that emerged in the impacts of the call out for both Alex and Andie are categorized in three areas: emotional impact, relational impact, and psychological impact. While I focus on the impacts within these separate categories, many of the impacts can be classified within two or more categories. For example, feeling hurt because someone is no longer considered a part of the community, may be classified as both an emotional and relational impact.

Table 3: Common/Similar impacts			
	Type of Impact from being publicly called out		
Pseudonym	Emotional	Relational	Psychological
Alex	X	X	X
Andie	X	X	X

### Emotional Impacts

Emotional wellness can be described as a balanced emotional body, healthy ways of engaging and expressing emotions. Wellness is when emotions are not barriers to living in right relationship with oneself, others, and the environment. Both Alex and Andie voiced experiencing feelings of hurt as a result of being called out.

## **Hurt**

With trepidation, Alex wondered if he should have spoken up and engaged in the immediate call out instead of the choice he made of being quiet. He questions if speaking up would have prevented any of what manifested from being called out and remaining silent.

*I think part of my silence and part of that hermitting allowed for that shit to continue, but yo no se. It impacted me so much where I could say pretty clearly and assertively that I don't have a relationship and I'm not in community with the QTPOC community in [that city] anymore. It still causes me a lot of anxiety being in those spaces. It doesn't feel like my community and it hurts when I had that realization.*

When Alex realized that he no longer felt a part of the QTPOC community in his city he felt hurt. He shared that he did not engage in substance abuse to block out the hurt, despite feeling scarred by the situation, because he went to therapy, to his altar, and to his spirit guides to figure out how to heal. It became clear to him that he would not have been holistically happy had he remained living, working, and communing in his city.

Andie describes themselves as an empath and was aware that this quality and gift they possess would require them to leave spaces if their emotional energy is picking up on vibrations that did not serve their wellness. Andie felt a multitude of emotions when they were publicly called out, but describes the core feeling as hurt.

*I think, for that to have happened in such a public matter and without even trying to make attempts to like check in, or pull us aside, just felt like it was hurt.*

## **Decrease in Self-Confidence**

In addition to feeling hurt by being publicly called out, both Alex and Andie experienced a decrease in their self-confidence. Alex expressed that as a result of the call out he felt anxious, insecure, and a lack of confidence, in addition to the dysphoria he was experiencing navigating

the world now presenting in a gender that people read as cismale. As a result, Alex had multiple emotions, that may have had competing needs, that could have contributed to emotional dis-ease.

When sharing the impact they experienced from being called out publicly, Andie shares that during the midst of being called out, an act of violence happened towards Black Queer and Trans folx that was making national news. For Andie, this felt like a double hit because not only were they mourning what took place nationally, but they were also mourning the relationship between the group of people who called them out, which directly influenced how they felt about themselves within Black organizing spaces.

*Personally it impacted my confidence around whether or not I should be a part of an organizing space, my direct action organizing space.*

## **Anxiety**

Alex experienced a lot of anxiety being in QTBIPOC spaces in his city during and after the time of the call out. To this day, he is still experiencing a lot of anxiety. He realized he had been in a depression spell when he made the move to the west coast in January 2023, six years after the initial public call out.

*What is it to build community? What is it to build community with other QTPOC folk?*

When Alex moved to the west coast, he met other QTPOC individuals in the doctoral program he is currently enrolled in. He voiced that he is connecting with others more on a surface level, not as deep as he is used to, and not sharing as much of his time as he normally would because he is feeling a lot of fears, suspicions, and hesitations as a direct result of the public call out.

*I've been struggling. I finished a quarter and now I'm like alright I'm in the second quarter, so now I feel like I'm in this stage where I don't have to root myself in completely, but I want to feel like I could put my feet on the ground a little bit and know that this is somebody I can lean towards. This is somebody I can call and I don't quite yet feel that. A lot of it is a lot of this anxiety that I have. I was like yeah cool I did the*

*repotting, now you actually have to like be in the garden and that's scary. Still feels very scary.*

Andie also experienced feelings of anxiety in spaces that they were once familiar with, a time prior to the call out, where they moved through these spaces without anxiety in their emotional body.

*I got publicly called out on Facebook and then I think, remnants of cancel culture ended up happening as a result. What that looked like in practice was, going into spaces afterwards, and feeling hella anxious.*

These spaces that Andie was once familiar with, while physically accessible, no longer were an emotionally safe environment for them to exist in as their authentic self without looming anxiety.

Emotional impacts, such as insecurity, depression, fears, suspicions, anxiety, hurt, and decreased self-confidence, if unaddressed, may contribute to an individual isolating from others or further harming self or others because one is not in good emotional health. During a time where these emotional implications can lead to disempowerment, individuals being called out need to feel connected and encouraged by others to heal so that they are able to be in authentic relationship with their self-accountability.

Sasha shares that oftentimes the impacts of being called out leave individuals who were called out in a vulnerable place because they lose access to people, places, and things; and to add, they lose a sense of self through their emotional dis-ease that needs to be addressed. This coupled with a lack of knowledge around transformative justice space holders and/or the lack of resources to work with a therapist can contribute to an individual navigating their emotional state without support.

*There is usually this binary [dynamic] that we see, survivor/person that causes harm, victim/perpetrator and there usually isn't a lot of conversation that happens [about] people that hold relational space.*

## **Relational Impacts**

As a result of the call out, Alex and Andie were now branded, through external interpretations by others, by what was communicated in the call outs made about them; the call out leading the charge or the confusion around their reputation within their communities. The public call out on social media, not only isolated them from their respective communities, but also contributed to difficult experiences being in community and having relationships after the fact.

The common relational impacts that Alex and Andie experienced were: taking a break and/or leaving their community, feeling and/or learning that folx were gossiping about them, and struggling to build community after being called out.

## **Took a Break and/or Left Community**

Alex expressed that after being called out, he no longer felt good living and working in the city he once considered home.

*Part of what I needed to do to heal and show up differently was I needed to be out of it. I think I could have maintained, but I don't think I would've been able to grow. And I got to a place in my life where I wanted to grow.*

He uses an analogy of the meticulous and intentional work removing root rot and repotting his plants over the weekend to describe his experience, taking “that little white tip I had left in me”; leaving his community to repot himself and focus on his healing work.

*I still replanted it because at the stem, you see there's a very bright white tip and that bright white tip is indication that there's still life, there's still nutrients there and that you should just put it back in fresh soil that's not rotted, water it, replant it and they recommend just let the plant do what it gotta do and eventually it will grow new roots and that's how they say you heal the root rot with the plants.*

As shared, the Black organizing community was a fairly new community for Andie. In addition to just joining this community, they were navigating their own internal struggles with their Blackness, queerness, and belonging. As a result of the call out, coupled with what they were navigating internally, they made the decision to take a step back from the organizing spaces.

*After this experience, it just felt like nothing was moving in a way where I could arrive in spaces and feel safe. Honestly, for me, safety in that experience was being able to come into space, all of who I was.*

Whether due to a lack of safety to show up fully or conditions that prevent growth and holistic happiness, both Andie and Alex made the choice to take a break or step away from their communities because it was necessary to honor their own humanity.

### **Gossip**

Alex had a core fear and paranoia around folx talking about him because of the call out communicated on Facebook. These fears were brought into fruition when someone he met post call out and who he considers a friend today, confirmed that before they met, conversations about him were taking place in her home because of the call out.

*Her and her partner and this person they would just talk shit talk shit talk shit... This person who knows nothing about the organization, never came by the organization, didn't come to any community events, was not talking to me directly.*

Andie expressed that after their call out experience they could not have conversations with folx “without it feeling like gossiping or cliquish.” The call out coupled with the fact that the person who called them out was well connected within the direct action organizing community and what they were experiencing internally with being new to the city and being in graduate school, did not feel worth it to Andie to continue to experience high levels of anxieties just to be a part of this community.



*That said, I was still able to find other communities ... The direct action organizing community, it just didn't feel right.*

Gossiping is not a characteristic that contributes to being in right relationship with self and others because it is taking information that is not founded in validity and sharing it with others, posed as truth. It is not rooted in love and is a divisive tool. The splitting that results from gossiping, a relational impact, be it interpersonally or individually, can increase emotional states that bring individuals and communities further away from truth, healing, and love. It is no wonder that Alex and Andie found themselves struggling to be in relationship with others within their communities after being called out.

### **Community Relationships After Call Out**

Alex felt the need to leave his city to allow himself the opportunity to grow and thrive and is learning that there are still some barriers keeping him from connecting more deeply with folx within the QTBIPOC community in the west coast. He feels that he is still struggling building community because of the residual feelings from the call out incident that happened six years ago.

*I'm like yo that doesn't feel good and I wish people would know, like are you leading this call out or this cancel tool with love or are you leading it with something else and just to really think about the implications of what that something else could really do. I just haven't seen cancel culture done in a loving way yet, and I don't know if it means that that doesn't exist. You know, an oxymoron because I think leading with love is something different.*

Andie experienced the call out as something that deepened the already existing fracture within the organizing community. The call out contributed to them no longer being able to be in conversation with folx that they used to be in conversation with prior. This resulted in Andie needing to navigate conversations with a comrade who was part of the initial fracture in the

direct action organizing community three years after the call out, and while time helped, this did not ease the nervous feelings and overthinking Andie experienced leading up to the conversation.

*It still felt awkward being in spaces and sharing spaces with folks who had either heard about, experienced, or was a part of the call out.*

Without a transformative justice process, call outs negatively impact relational security and trust, not only for the individuals who were called out, but also for the community witnessing the call out.

In Harper's work with QTBIPOC communities, she has noticed a theme of confusion, broken down into three categories, within the community's response to witnessing a call out: (1) people who will cosign right away, (2) people who are not relationally close to either parties involved in the call out and feel that being a barrier to assess the situation, not knowing what to do, and (3) people who are just totally disconnected, checked out, and do not want to deal with the situation.

### **Psychological Impacts**

The call outs and its implications resulted in psychological impacts dealing with the emotional and mental body of the individuals who were called out. While psychological impacts include emotional effects, there is a strong emphasis on one's mental capacity and what one may think and believe as a result. Themes that emerged from Alex and Andie's experiences were feeling unsafe and questioning their sense of worthiness.

### **Feeling unsafe**

Alex felt like he was losing his mind after being called out. He did not know who to trust. He had a sense that people were talking about him, but was not sure who was talking and to whom they were talking to because no one was talking to him.

*I got to a point where I felt like I lost my goddamn mind because the energy that I felt around me was like I felt paranoid. I felt suspicious. I felt la gente me estaban mandando mal de ojo constantemente and you can't say that, right? You can't be like I just feel like people are talking. I can't say out loud what that feels like.*

Mal de ojo, “evil eye,” is considered to be a “culturally specific illness” (Martinez, 2015, p. 1030). The fact that Alex felt this allows me to conclude that he was not only psychologically impacted, but there were also physical and spiritual implications.

Andie did not feel safe to be themselves in community spaces due to the relational and emotional impacts of the call out. As a result, they took a step back from organizing spaces, a space they had recently joined to support the development of their sense of belonging.

### **Sense of Worthiness**

In addition to their safety being compromised, both Alex and Andie navigated feelings and experiences that impacted their sense of worthiness.

There were moments in my conversation with Alex where he presented information with hesitation and, despite the fact that this was a space to learn about his experience, he took time to honor those who used the call out tool against him and uplift his understanding of power and privilege. My sense, in the discomfort in retelling his story, were the conditions created by the binary survivor/perpetrator dynamic. What does it mean to not acknowledge your understanding of the “opposite” position in this binary, should you share about your experience as the person who was called out?

*I think my the little peanut in my head of imposter syndrome or whatever, that shame peanut that comes up, I did have a moment where I was like fuck, I sound like I'm just whining or I sound like because it is so one directional right where it's just like you're asking me from this very specific perspective and experience. I struggle with sharing. I struggle with vulnerability. I struggle with sharing. I don't want anything that I say to be misinterpreted or misunderstood as like I'm not conscious of like how harm and privilege and fucking stuff function and work.*

Andie experienced exhaustion from the internal conversations they were having with themselves around their sense of self, which was heightened after the call out. What also contributed to their exhaustion was the need to fight for their sense of credibility around being worthy of doing direct action organizing and being in space.

*When I say fighting, I mean, both internally, because I feel like there was my own stuff that I was navigating as a result, but then also, like, in spaces in the sense of no longer being invited in different spaces, or folks ghosting or whatnot as well.*

Experiencing unsafety and fighting for or justifying your sense of worthiness are direct results of conditions that are dehumanizing because safety and belonging are fundamental human social needs.

### Learnings

Each participant interviewed had unique learnings from the call out experience and impacts which can be found on Table 4. This section will highlight the voices of Alex and Andie, where they will share their learnings from their call out experiences. My analysis will be included in the conclusion of this chapter.

<b>Table 4: Learnings from the call out experience</b>						
Pseudonym	Move at the Speed of Trust	Principled Struggle	Accountability is not Punishment	Privilege	How to be in Relationship	People are Hurting
Alex				X	X	X
Andie	X	X	X			

#### **Alex's Learnings**

*One of the learnings is that as much as it impacted me in all of these different ways one of the things that it did highlight for me was my privileges. I think you are in a position of privilege if you are being called out because while the call out is happening and while I have issues with that form or what that kind of tool generates I mean whether or not it's conducive to community building, which I don't think so, but I think what it highlighted to*

*me though was you're in a position of privilege right now where there is something that is obviously impacting this particularly person or these individuals or these people where they need to engage in call out, that means that you look like or are functioning or are working or you are in a particular realm right now where you have some protected privileges. I think another learning would be that I learned something different about my own needs and I know that sounds selfish as fuck, but to be just clearer and sharper with how I want to be in relationship. I don't think if I would have gone through that experience that I would have now the clarity that I do have. I think part of that experience of that call out made a lot of things very clear for me and another learning and I think, I don't want to say that it's sad, but I think what any kind of call out highlights for me or illustrates for me is like, PEOPLE ARE HURTING. And that's the sad part for me is like damn either people are hurting or people are like feeling so fucked up about something where that was what they saw that they had to use esa forma to to get whatever sense of justice.*

## **Andie's Learnings**

*adrienne maree brown essentially put this together, but I think organizing and advocacy wise, I think the biggest thing is to move at the speed of trust. If we are intentionally bringing in folks to organize, to advocate to build with, especially in a space where there's a lot of urgent stuff happening, we have to be able to trust each other in order to move through and move with and be with each other. So that's like one piece of lessons learned. Another piece of lesson too is just this idea around principled struggle. And the idea behind it is, we can still be in conflict with each other. If the end goal is for us to collectively move to liberation, then being able to hold that for the betterment of the good, so to speak. And so I think there's this piece around principled struggle that I'm still learning, but for that particular incident, because it was so public and it felt like it also rippled from other moments of conflict that we had experienced, being able to be in principled struggle together. This is something that I think about deeply still to this day. And then I think just the way of like, this piece around accountability too. Yeah, I think at the time, when the call out happened, it was their attempt to hold us accountable and it felt like it was their attempt to try to punish us in a public format for what we did. And so there's this piece around accountability where I try to remember, if accountability is being brought into this space, I definitely want to reassure folks that it's not a form of punishment, it's an opportunity for us to be able to be responsible for our action, recognize the harm and the hurt that it's caused, and moving away [from the behavior that caused harm] so that that doesn't happen again. So I think for me, how do I be accountable to folks that I cause harm with even if in the moment it doesn't feel like I'm "at fault?" Yeah, there's still responsibility for me in causing the impact of harm towards other folks, too. And I think there's the last thing around social media today. I do not call people out on social media. If there's something that needs to be done, I guess it's a call*

*in, which is the phrase now. Doing it in an intentional way where it feels more relational and bringing in outside support as well.*

## **Conclusion**

“*Testimonio* is a pedagogical tool that lends itself to a form of teaching and learning that brings the mind, body, spirit, and political urgency to the fore” (Bernal et al, 2012, p. 367). The testimonios of the participants in this thesis are intended to examine a tool being used to bring about justice and meet needs by marginalized individuals towards other folx holding historically marginalized identities. While folx who use the tool are using it to get a need met, due to the emotional, social, and psychological implications of the tool being used, like ostracization, folx who are deemed wrongdoers hesitate to share their experience about the matter, resulting in dis-ease, discomfort, and a need for healing. This tool may meet the immediate need, but may not address root causes, which is not aligned with transformative justice. Support and connection is needed so that one is best positioned to engage in authentic self-accountability, which reveals the root causes of behaviors. Once revealed through one's self examination, root causes may be addressed to not only end the cycle, but also better serve self, community, and the environment in healthy and loving ways.

Alex and Andie’s communities, small queer and trans, BIPOC communities addressing injustices related to race, gender, and sexuality, used the public call out tool to meet their immediate needs. The tool was experienced by Alex and Andie as a punitive tactic to shame and shun them. As a direct result of the experience of being called out, Alex and Andie experienced emotional, relational, and psychological impacts, that they chose to receive outside support from a therapist, but unfortunately, this support is only accessible to those who can meet the financial exchange for this support service. The lack of support from the community may have a lasting

detrimental effect because “rarely, if ever, are any of us healed in isolation. Healing is an act of communion” (hooks, 2001, p. 215).

Community leaders Sasha and Harper share the need for QTBIPOC communities to develop skills in self-accountability and curiosity, while uplifting folx in the community who hold space for others and are skilled in transformative justice processes. The work of self-accountability and being curious requires intentional self-awareness, self-reflection, and connection.

## **CHAPTER IV DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

*“If I hit you and you hit me, and I hit you back and you hit me back, and go on, you see, that goes on ad infinitum. It just never ends. Somewhere somebody must have a little sense, and that’s the strong person. The strong person is the person who can cut off the chain of hate, the chain of evil.” - Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr (1957)*

### **Discussion**

My research sought to examine the nuances and complexities of the use of social media public callouts as an accountability tool to address harm within the QTBIPOC community. While social media has been used as a tool to bring communities together, share information, and raise awareness, it has also become an avenue to shame, divide, and further harm communities. Existing literature focuses on the use of social media as a complex tool to call out social injustice and harm.

I focused on examining the experiences and impacts of QTBIPOC individuals who have been publicly called out on social media. Participants of the study shared their experiences being called out on social media and the impacts they both experienced as a result. As the data show, Alex and Andie experienced difficulty navigating and feeling safe in community spaces after being called out because their community was small, they did not engage in prior conversation with the folx who employed the tool, and they experienced the call out as punishment with no guidance nor support on how to navigate the impacts of being called out. As a result, Alex and Andie experienced anxiety, a decrease in their self worth, and made the decision to take a break from the community spaces they once occupied, not entirely because they chose to reflect on their actions, but also because the environments were no longer safe and were considered toxic.



Community leaders, Sasha and Harper, shared their experiences doing accountability work within QTBIPOC communities and added to the findings of the experiences of being publicly called out. Their additions to the research show that “knee-jerk” public call outs as a tool for punishment and shame can activate trauma responses rooted in survival and the fear of being kicked out of your community. While the goal of a public call out may be to get a need met, the person being called out may respond from a place of trauma, and be over or under accountable. Responding from this place does not create capacity for growth and healing necessary to not only address the present infraction, but also the root causes that allow for transformative healing to happen for everyone, including the community. They also highlight that everyone has the capacity to cause harm, and to some degree may have already caused harm within community spaces because we are living within a violent system. While Harper highlights that there is “no batterers island,” when using public call outs for the purpose of shaming and canceling someone from their community, such actions are contributing to a culture of disposability and are cementing conditions where curiosity and self-accountability are not possible.

### **Conclusions**

The research questions for QTBIPOC individuals who have been publicly called out were asked to provide information on key areas focused on experience, impacts, response, support, and learnings related to being publicly called out.

As the data show, QTBIPOC individuals who have been publicly called out on social media were also a part of a small community where rupture existed prior to the call out. Within the small community, the existing rupture was never addressed nor repaired. Both participants experienced a desire to have had a conversation instead of being publicly called out and felt like

this was possible given their prior relationships and work with the folx who enacted the call out. As a result, Andie and Alex experienced the public call out as a form of punishment where they did not receive support from community members nor folx trained in conflict and transformative justice.

The data shows that the participants were impacted on the emotional, relational, and psychological level, each level consisting of subcategories. On the emotional level, Alex and Andie experienced hurt, decrease in confidence, and anxiety. On the relational level, they experienced taking a break from the community, gossip, and difficulty navigating relational spaces after the call out. On the psychological level, Alex and Andie experienced a decrease of their self-worth and felt unsafe in community spaces. As a response to the call out, the data shows that Alex did not respond to the direct comments and Andie vented to friends and experienced rage. Both Andie and Alex, were confused around the choice of being addressed publicly and so their responses were in part, rooted in their dismay of the use of the public call out.

As indicated in the data, Andie and Alex did not receive support during and after the time of being publicly called out. They both desired a conversation instead of the call out and wished to have engaged in a transformative justice process to address the conflict and rupture.

The data show that there were big takeaways from the experience being called out, mainly around how to be in relationship with others, especially around conflict, when there is a knowing that people are hurting. Additionally, in self-examination, there was a learning around understanding one's privilege and a takeaway that accountability is not punishment.

The analysis of the testimonios from the community leaders aimed to provide information on key research questions focused on accountability, the use of social media as a tool to call out

injustice, and impacts of call outs. The data show that curiosity is at the center of accountability and being responsible for our choices and the consequences of those choices. As the data show communities are using social media as a tool to call out injustice because when communities do not have access to a lot of institutional power, making things visible can grant them access, to feel attended to, feel seen, and gain social capital. It is a way to get needs met or communicate a need that is not yet met. Lastly, as indicated by the data, some of the impacts of public call outs on individuals receiving it is shame enmeshed with the behavior being called into question, the person using the tool not knowing if the call out will make them feel better, and there being community confusion around how to respond to what they are learning from witnessing the call out.

The analytical goal of this study was to shed light on the experiences of QTBIPOC folk who have been publicly called out. The nuance in public callouts is that social media is only meant to share a snippet of information, not the full picture, and will not communicate complexity that is present in the information that folk are choosing to share publicly. As the findings indicate, not all harm can be categorized equally. While there may be a need to publicly call out someone who is continuously causing harm within the community, there are some incidents, for example, the incidents with Alex and Andie, that could have been dealt with without publicly shaming. While Alex and Andie learned from this experience, on a community level, transformation did not take place. There was no examination of the root cause that allowed for what was being called out to occur nor an opportunity for all to heal. While I did not focus this study on the folk who employed the tool nor the community that witnessed the call out, through speaking with Andie and Alex I learned that the call out did not create opportunity for their healing, if anything, it was cause for the emotional, relational, and psychological impacts

they experienced. Additionally, both Alex and Andie expressed that the call out tool felt like punishment, which does not align with TJ because transformative justice requires an unlearning of punitive tactics as a form to address injustice.

### **Recommendations**

This study is a compassionate call to action to QTBIPOC individuals and communities. Public call outs for the use of shaming and canceling someone is a “master’s tool” and furthers harm. There is a need to not only heal root causes of harm, but also, to develop our skills in conflict, curiosity and our ability to hold complexity, while understanding our personal and community values, and how we want to be in relationship with others. Without this collective focus to heal and develop our skills, we are using punitive tactics that lead to personal and collective disembodiment, piling on pain and trauma within our communities due to the already existing oppression and discrimination that QTBIPOC folx experience daily. I see that the tool of “knee-jerk” public call outs that serve to shame is not a transformative justice tool. Shame keeps one within themselves and that is not the place to be when you want to center and support others and examine the deep roots that led to that behavior. Andie speaks about being in principled struggle as a skill to develop, especially when folx who have caused harm, made a mistake, and are a part of the conflict being experienced are doing the work to understand their role in what is going on and also working to learn and change behavior. Sasha and Harper emphasize curiosity being a quality to develop in order to be able to hold complexity required in navigating relationships and the harm that presents itself within these dynamics.

Based on what I have learned in this study, I invite folx who have been called out publicly to hold self-compassion as you navigate this time, especially if you are experiencing shame and isolation from the community, because as Danielle Sered (NBCUniversal News

Group, 2019) shares, “No one enters violence for the first time having committed it” (n.p.).

While you may need to take a break from the community to engage in self-examination and reflection, this does not mean that you can no longer be a contributing member to society. This does not mean that you do not deserve a space to use your voice to share your experiences and impacts related to this situation, because your behavior is rooted in an unspoken truth and there is opportunity to learn, heal, and change. Silence and isolation will manifest dis-ease, which is detrimental to not only the individual, but the community as a whole. Transformative justice requires that we address the root of things so that we do not perpetuate harm and are able to build caring communities.

To therapists, particularly therapists who work with QTBIPOC individuals, from the stories shared in this study, folx are turning towards professional help after being publicly called out and isolated from their communities. Public call outs as a tool for punishment is activating trauma responses grounded in real fear and a human need for survival for QTBIPOC individuals who have been canceled from their communities, while also existing within a society that prioritizes a dominant worldview and those closest to power and privilege. What are the ways to support individuals who hold historically marginalized identities who have been kicked out of their community and are no longer feeling safe in community spaces? Is there a way to collaborate and uplift the work of community workers who are skilled in accountability processes founded in transformative justice?

To transformative justice practitioners holding accountability processes, thank you for the work that you do. I have learned that this is not necessarily a role that is uplifted in communities. I have learned from my conversations with Sasha and Harper, that folx in this role may have

either experienced receiving harm or committing harm, and are passionate about this work from a real personal place.

Further research is needed to understand the perspective of why QTBIPOC folx employ the tool of social media public call outs. Additionally, this research presented the need for further research in understanding language being used such as: call out culture, cancel culture, accountability, and transformative justice, as there may not be a common understanding of these terms.

A takeaway from the research and the folx I talked to is that a call out speaks to one narrative of an experience that oftentimes communicates an unmet need. The mechanics of social media, like, share, comment, or do nothing, does not support the development of curiosity and contributes to the confusion within community responses. This is important to keep in mind when employing the tool against an already marginalized individual or community. Another takeaway from the research is that we as a collective are not turning towards each other in moments of conflict and as a result are piling on and/or bypassing hurts that are not being addressed. Additionally, the impacts of being publicly called out by QT and BIPOC communities as an individual with multiple marginalized identities, can be considered life or death. There is a need for support because this tool targets the removal of a lifeline – community. The tool may be detrimental on the emotional, relational, and psychological level when used against folx of marginalized identities. When used to shame, the tool leads to isolation which further hurts the collective as punitive tactics are continuing to be exercised which does not aid community healing.

Despite living within the western worldview of individualism, navigating rupture within relationships and communities cannot be done alone. Calling out on social media may create the

conditions for the individual using the tool to not feel alone, however, when used to shame, it isolates the individual(s) being called out. In order to address interpersonal and community ruptures through a transformative justice approach, we must rely on each other and shift the embodied and collective understanding that we can not transform our punitive and violent society alone.

## EPILOGUE

Alone (an excerpt)

Maya Angelou (Academy of American Poets, n.d.)

But nobody  
No, nobody  
Can make it out here alone.  
Alone, all alone  
Nobody, but nobody  
Can make it out here alone.  
Now if you listen closely  
I'll tell you what I know  
Storm clouds are gathering  
The wind is gonna blow  
The race of man is suffering  
And I can hear the moan,  
'Cause nobody,  
But nobody  
Can make it out here alone.  
Alone, all alone  
Nobody, but nobody  
Can make it out here alone.



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