

Calling In/Calling Out, AKA "That Time I Got Called Out and Didn't Die"

- This stuff is fraught!
- Receiving criticism is fraught: We all want to be good people and not cause harm, and hearing we've caused harm is hard. Many people struggle with differentiating criticism of actions from criticism of self, and we get defensive and shut down.
- Giving criticism is fraught: There are lots of social norms that encourage us to not speak up - it's awkward, maybe there are power dynamics (age, community status, real or perceived expertise, etc.) you don't want to be seen as the killjoy.
- I get anxious as hell having these conversations, whichever side I'm on, and it's important for me to remember that having them isn't going to kill me. It's going to be uncomfortable because growth is uncomfortable, but I can survive it, and I/my community will be better for it.

Giving Feedback

Framework - Calling Out vs Calling In

- Calling Out:
 - greater public accountability, others to hear and support you in saying this thing isn't okay
 - can stop ongoing harmful behavior by interrupting it
 - can put people more on defensive
 - can feel harder depending on your position in community and social norms
- Calling In:
 - more likely to hear what you're saying and not get defensive
 - doesn't have to be in the moment if that feels challenging; can also be by email with links if having time to choose your words helps
 - takes different energy to be patient and educate
 - may be less effective if the person is unwilling to listen or treats it as a difference of opinion.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- **Who has the power** in this situation? The person I'm calling in/out, or me? (If you have the power in this situation, consider calling them in.) - dif types and combos of power - I'm younger but in this community longer, or older but newer to community

- **How much energy** and emotional labor am I able to share right now? - Try to do the work if it's not targeting you and you have capacity, go ahead and ask for backup and reinforcement if needed.
- Is this person **likely to change** their problematic behavior? (If they are not, call them out. If this is someone you've called in before and they're still repeating their actions, call them out.) Paul S!
- Who is in the room? **Who am I accountable to** in this moment? Am I centering the needs of myself or the group? What will happen if I call this behavior out? What will happen if I call this person in?
- **What am I hoping to accomplish** with this call-in or call-out?

Starting the Conversation

- 1) Pick a Method.
- 2) Mention the specific action and explain why it was hurtful or oppressive.

Exs. "I need to stop you there because something you just said is not accurate."
 "The song you sang made me uncomfortable."
 "I'm having a reaction to that comment. Let's go back for a minute."
 "Do you think you would say that if someone from that group was with us in the room?"
 "There's some history behind that expression you just used that you might not know about."

(from "[Speaking Up Without Tearing Down](#)" by Loretta Ross)

- 3) Be open to discussion, provide more resources if asked (this doesn't necessarily mean engage in debate. Lyrics convos can easily go this way and you can say "I'm not going to argue the point.")
- I like to start with a call in because I think they work better, but persistent refusals to hear get a call out with friends for backup, and eventually escalation to sing organizers.
 - If I'm feeling conflict-avoidant and/or have the power in a situation I sometimes frame it as passive information, "Oh it's such a bummer that we know that term is racist now because the verse is fun, but what can you do?" "Racism/Misogyny is why we can't have nice things!" You can also cheerfully offer a lyric fix that others have used if you know of one.

- Depending on the relationship/environment you can try to be silly about it. Saying other lyrics in place of the problematic ones "And now they're friends!" gets the message across and starts a new norm, but I don't know how it went over the first few times, and it backfires in some contexts, by either being unclear about the nature of the problem, or alienating the singer who is being shouted over.
- In a smaller group, you can split the difference between call out and in by having side conversation audible to others. (Still depends on who's in the room/potential for immediate harm.)

Things that help me feel empowered to give feedback:

- *I* didn't make it awkward, racism and people who double-down on using racist terms made it awkward.
- Intent vs impact and foot-stepping. If someone is stepping on my foot, or my friend's foot, I'm going to tell them! I'm going to assume that my friends and community don't want to harm me/my community and that, once informed that they are causing harm, they will act to change it. I'm not going to scream at them or deride them for not knowing they were on my foot, but I am going to say, "Ouch! You are on my foot! Please stop!"

Receiving Feedback

- 1) Take a deep breath! It's okay to ask for a minute to gather yourself to be ready to hear the feedback.
- 2) Feedback is a gift, not an attack. My body doesn't know this yet either, so I have to tell it every time.
- 3) Remember that your self-worth is not on trial. We are all going to make mistakes, it is okay and necessary for learning.
- 4) Listen, ask questions, take notes. It's okay to ask clarifying questions or to ask the person giving you feedback if they know of resources where you can learn more. It's okay to take notes for yourself, especially if you (like me) tend to have crappy short term memory when your body is on high-alert from feeling attacked.
- 5) Ask yourself, "What if this were true?" If you're feeling defensive, treat the criticism as a hypothetical for a bit and consider what harm might have been caused and what repair might be needed.
- 6) Don't critique how the feedback was brought. Engage with the feedback first, even if you have a reaction to how/when it was raised. Giving feedback is hard and we're all learning how to do it well. Critiquing how it was expressed can distract from the substance.

- 7) Process Elsewhere first! Go flail to your friends, not at the person who just did a lot of work to give you feedback. They did not sign up to be your personal therapist.

(additions from [Brooke Anderson's article](#))

Things that help me receive feedback:

- This person cares enough about me that they are willing to do a hard thing and have this awkward conversation to teach me and give me an opportunity to do better.
- They are asking me to stop stepping on their foot! Oh gosh, I'm so sorry! I will try not to do that again.
- I don't need to explain why I did the thing (But I'm not usually a foot-stepper-onner! I'm usually a person who is very careful not to step on other people's feet! I am aware of my feet! Nope. Listen to the harm. Actively if you can (reflect back, maybe ask questions or for resources if things are unclear). Consider thanking the person for telling you if that feels possible (can also do later).
- Find a friend to flail at! Not the person who called you out/in!

Sources/Resources:

<http://www.seedtheway.com/resources.html> - Dr. Rebecca Haslam

Dr. Haslam's [chart on Calling Out vs Calling In](#)

<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/spring-2019/speaking-up-without-tearing-down>

[This Book is Anti-Racist by Tiffany Jewell](#)

[Excerpt from This Book is Anti-Racist on Calling In/Calling Out](#)

[10 Tips on Receiving Critical Feedback](#) by Brooke Anderson

[White Fragility](#) by Robin D'Angelo

[So You Want to Talk About Race](#) by Ijeoma Oluo

"No matter how progressive or well-read you are, there are always going to be moments in your life where somebody pushes back against something that's so culturally ingrained you never even considered it before. And you'll say "Huh, it never occurred to me to challenge this but you're right," and that doesn't mean you were "morally toxic" before, it means you're a non-omniscient human capable of growth.

Also, some preferred terms for things will change and evolve, and terms we prefer now might eventually be considered gauche or even offensive, and that doesn't mean you

were a bigot at the time for using them. It means we evolved as a society and chose new terminology to reflect that change.

Nobody is a fully formed realisation of progressivism that can predict all shifts and modes of thought. The world will always change, and hopefully you will, too."

- [Rachel on Tumblr](#)