Review of: "Support for Campus Censorship"

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This research, titled "Censorship on Campuses," proposes to examine whether there is a heightened tendency among individuals to censor information on campuses that is perceived as threatening to group equality or reinforcing of status hierarchies—specifically, information that portrays low-status groups unfavorably.

The subject of this study holds significant potential interest. However, I believe the work requires more conceptual precision to frame the object of analysis. Below, I provide suggestions and reflections intended to be useful to the authors.

Although the article is titled "Censorship on Campuses," in the general introduction of the article and given the authors' argumentative thread, the reader quickly infers that the authors intend to analyze whether there is a greater tendency to censor information that undermines the image of low-status groups compared to similar information about high-status groups. That is, the research question seems to be something like: If we consider a dimension of negative evaluation, for example, receiving a low grade on an intelligence test, can it be more censored when information attributing this result to a low-status group vs. to a high-status group? For example, on page 5, the last paragraph, the authors' arguments lead to this assumption, as it states, "...people selectively avoid information that challenges their moral and political beliefs (e.g., Stroud, 2010), and people evaluate information that challenges their moral and political beliefs more negatively than identical information that supports them (e.g., Ditto, Clark, et al., 2019; Ditto, Liu, et al., 2019)... Therefore, people may desire to censor information perceived as reinforcing a status hierarchy (information that portrays low-status groups unfavorably) relative to information that could help level or reverse the playing field (information that portrays individuals and high-status groups unfavorably) (Honeycutt & Jussim, 2020)."

In other words, it seems the authors want to test the tendency that people (especially those who support a liberal ideology) may have to reject the leveling strategy, through a negative comparison dimension, between low-status groups (vs. high-status groups).

I emphasize the need to revise the conceptual framework of this study, as in the current version of the manuscript, the authors maintain a somewhat inconsistent approach. Despite what the authors state in the introduction, as highlighted above, in Study 1, what they test is literally whether there is a greater tendency to censor positive information about high-status groups (i.e., "Researchers have argued that men are better leaders than women...") than the same type of information about low-status groups (i.e., "Researchers have argued that women are better leaders than men...").

Additionally, the authors point out ideology (i.e., conservatism vs. liberalism) as a possible causal antecedent to subjects' tendency to censor judgments or statements that devalue or undermine the image of groups occupying disadvantaged

positions in the social hierarchy (i.e., women and Black people). My doubts regarding all this are that perhaps people are not so motivated to deny unfavorable information regarding high-status groups but rather to try to equalize low-status groups with high-status ones through an upward comparison dimension, that is, based on achievements rather than on failures. I wonder if it would be informative for the authors' purpose to test to what extent information that unfavorably portrays individuals and high-status groups and individuals and low-status groups is aversive. In Western societies, the culture of success prevails, independent of liberal or conservative ideology. To test this assumption, it would be interesting to see the predictive role of individuals' achievement motivation or fear of failure and not just ideology.

Furthermore, it is possible that rather than ideology, what matters is a social pressure that promotes political correctness and the principle of equality that underpins democracy. Please note that in Study 1 and 2, the authors did not find a main effect of ideology in either the Intelligence condition or the Leadership condition. Whereas in Study 2, they did not find a main effect of ideology in any of the conditions (i.e., leadership, intelligence, violence).

Likewise, it would be desirable for them to take into account the connotation of the comparison dimension (i.e., positive and negative) between high- and low-status groups. The positive nature (i.e., related to positive outcomes: leadership, intelligence) or negative nature (i.e., related to negative outcomes: violence) of the comparison dimension between groups has been shown to be a significant variable that should be considered when analyzing attitudes and prejudiced responses.

Study 1

Method

The design should be described more precisely. It is not clear whether the design is within-subject or between-groups. It is stated that participants read five passages. Therefore, I understand that all participants read the passages that did not involve manipulation (i.e., Jurar and Gore), and half of the participants read one of the two conditions for each passage that involved manipulation (i.e., man vs. woman; Islam vs. Christianity; white vs. Black). Questions: Did they counterbalance the presentation of the five passages?

Important Limitations. The way to operationalize the experimental manipulation seems not to conform to the same constructin the three key passages that were provided to the participants. I am referring to the fact that if the object of study is to verify the degree of censorship of information that undermines the image of low status groups, why did they include religion? Which of the two (i.e. Islam vs. Christianity) has an inferior status? The Islam?

In my opinion, indeed, in the social hierarchy, women (vs. men) and Black people (vs. white people) are at a disadvantage occupying a lower status. However, this status dimension is not as clear in the comparison between Islam and Christianity.

On page 15, it says: "Three passages (on leadership, violence, and intelligence) were experimentally manipulated to portray either a relatively low-status group or a relatively high-status group unfavorably." My objection in this regard is that, for the case of the comparison man vs. woman and white vs. Black, the manipulation tests whether there is a greater

tendency to censor positive information (i.e., they are better leaders, they are more intelligent) about high-status groups than the same type of information about low-status groups. However, for the comparison Islam vs. Christianity, what they test is whether there is a greater tendency to censor negative information about Islam (vs. Christianity). Ultimately, changing the positive or negative connotation of the information on which the groups are compared can be a threat to the conceptual foundation of this study. As I have previously pointed out, the positive or negative nature of the comparison dimension between groups has been shown to be a significant variable that must be considered when analyzing attitudes and prejudiced responses. Subtle prejudice tends to manifest more when the comparison dimension is positive. In this sense, in Study 1, it was found that "There was no main effect of the religion condition."

On page 16, the authors mention the four statements to evaluate the outcome variable. Could they please be more precise and explain how they obtained the Censorship Support Index?

In the manipulations related to racial differences and differences between sexes, essentialist beliefs have also been emphasized. That is, there may be a genetic basis for these differences. This can be a confounding variable in itself. There is evidence that essentialist beliefs can play a significant role in the forms that prejudice responses take.

Include a Data Analysis section

Results

Improve the wording of this sentence, as it is not well understood: "In three separate regressions (one for each passage), we regressed support for censorship on the experimental manipulation, ideology (centered), and their interactions."

In the context of the limitations and suggestions I have pointed out, I invite the authors to reconsider the presentation of the results.

Discussion

In this section, the authors conclude, "Overall, the results were as expected. Participants, but especially liberals, tended to censor information that unfavorably portrayed low-status groups more than identical information that unfavorably portrayed high-status groups." I believe this conclusion is hasty and excessive considering the limitations I have pointed out.

Study 2

Question: Were participants in the US sample incentivized, but those in the British and Hungarian samples not?

Since this study followed the same procedure and methodology used in Study 1, I maintain the limitations and suggestions I have previously outlined.