

Virtually Standing Up or Standing By? Correlates of Enacting Social Control Online

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Abstract: Research has consistently established the robustness of the bystander effect, or the tendency of individuals to not intervene on behalf of others in emergency situations. This study examines the bystander effect in an online setting, focusing on factors that lead individuals to intervene, and therefore enact informal social control, on behalf of others who are being targeted by hate material. To address this question, we use an online survey (N=647) of youth and young adults recruited from a demographically balanced sample of Americans. Results demonstrate that the enactment of social control is positively affected by the existence of strong offline and online social bonds, collective efficacy, prior victimization, self-esteem, and an aversion for the hate material in question. Additionally, the amount of time that individuals spend online affects their likelihood of intervention. These findings provide important insights into the processes that underlie informal social control and begin to bridge the gap in knowledge between social control in the physical and virtual realms.

Keywords: Online Social Control, Bystander Effect, Online Hate and Extremism, Netiquette.

INTRODUCTION

When faced with a social dilemma, such as whether to assist a stranger in peril, most bystanders will choose not to intercede and assume the risks that doing so entails. According to Latané and Nida (1981), the *bystander effect* is not only one of the most well-established precepts in the field of social psychology, but also one of the most frequently replicated. This study examines the bystander effect in an online setting, focusing on factors that correlate with prosocial online behavior. Prosocial behavior is commonly defined as “voluntary behavior intended to benefit another” (Eisenberg, Fabes, and Spinrad, 2006, p. 646), and in the present context is operationalized as an intervention by an individual in an attempt to stop someone from targeting others with hateful material online.

Countless studies have observed the bystander effect in an array of experimental and real-world situations (for a comprehensive overview, see Fischer *et al.* 2011; Thornberg 2007; Latané and Nina 1981). Researchers have detailed how, and under what circumstances, observers react to emergency situations such as falls, theft, smoke-filled rooms,

crashes, asthma attacks, and fainting (Thornberg 2010). Other work examined bystander reactions to interpersonal violence (Christy and Voigt 1994; Banyard 2008), school bullying, and more recently, cyberbullying (Desmet *et al.* 2014; Kumazaki *et al.* 2011). But while researchers have begun to examine bystander behavior in cyberspace, much of what we know about this phenomenon is grounded in work examining behaviors in the physical world (Baynard; 2008, Banyard, Plante, and Moynihan 2004; Berkowitz 2002; Katz 1994; Darley and Latané 1968). Thus, additional investigation is needed to understand bystander behavior online. To that end, we explore factors that affect the likelihood that an individual will enact informal social control, or *netiquette* (Shea 1994; Scheuermann and Taylor 1997), on behalf of someone who is being targeted by hate material online. To do so we utilize a demographically representative sample of young adults, ages 15-36, who were asked a series of questions concerning their experiences with online hate material. This study addresses four primary research questions:

1. Does having strong online and offline social bonds increase the likelihood of enacting informal social control online?
2. Are individuals who have been victimized by hate online more likely to enact informal social control online?

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3. Does self-esteem increase the likelihood that an individual will enact informal social control online?
4. Does collective efficacy increase the likelihood that an individual will enact informal social control online?

Our paper proceeds in the following manner: we begin by briefly detailing the nature and extent of hate speech online. A discussion of social control online, highlighting the challenges of curtailing hate speech, follows. This is preceded by a discussion of bystander behavior in the physical world, which subsequently informs this research. We then use an ordinal logistic regression to examine factors that affect the enactment of online social control. This paper concludes with a discussion of the key findings, study limitations, and avenues for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Nature and Extent of Online Hate Speech

The positive attributes of the Internet are indeed myriad, as are the pitfalls. While the Internet can educate, inspire, and instantly connect people around the globe, it can just as quickly and easily spread hateful material to a large audience. Online hate is a distinct form of cyberviolence (Wall 2001) that utilizes computer technology to profess negative attitudes towards others based on a host of characteristics, including race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and national origin, among others. What is unique about online hate, distinguishing it from other forms of cyberviolence, such as online bullying or cybercrime, is that it deliberately targets a collective (Hawdon *et al.* 2014).

From the inception of the Internet for public use, hate groups have shown an adroit aptitude for online activity. To wit, notorious white supremacist group, Stormfront, believed to be the first hate group with a web presence, launched its inaugural website in 1995. By 2009, Stormfront boasted over 159,000 members (Bowman-Grieve 2009), rendering it one of the most visited hate sites on the Internet (Brown 2009). The Internet made *traditional* forms of recruiting all but anachronistic. Disseminators of hate could now easily and efficiently use blogs, social media, and mass emails to reach a larger audience, transcending geographic constraints and fostering a sense of community amongst group members in disparate

locales. American Neo-Nazi, Jeff Voss, succinctly summarized the importance of the Internet to hate groups, remarking “the Internet is our battleground” (Philips 2016).

The way online hate is circulated has evolved since the mid-1990s, however. While there is certainly no shortage of online hate groups—with the number of active online groups increasing from approximately 150 in 1996 to 11,500 in 2011 (Brown 2009; Chen *et al.* 2008; Cooper 2010)—organized online hate groups are now outpaced by individuals who maintain websites, or simply make hateful comments on social media platforms (Potok 2015). And exposure to online hate is increasing. In 2013, 53 percent of Americans ages 15 – 30 were exposed to online hate materials; in a similar sample collected in 2015, 63 percent of respondents had been exposed (compare Hawdon Oksanen, and Räsänen 2015 and Costello, Hawdon, and Ratliff. 2016; also see Ybarra, Mitchell, and Korchmaros 2011). Thus, the spread of hate material online has apparently accelerated with the rise of social media, offering hate groups new and innovative ways to garner more eyeballs and increase clicks.

The surge in online hate translates to an increase in the number of individuals feeling the effects of exposure to, or targeting by, such material. While not all online hate is victimizing – some individuals, for example, actively seek it out, and many view the material without negative repercussions (Douglas *et al.* 2005; Glaser *et al.* 2002; Gerstenfeld *et al.* 2003; McNamee *et al.* 2010) – others report a host of deleterious outcomes associated with exposure to online hate (Subrahmanyam and Šmahel 2011). These ill-effects include mood swings, anger, fear (Tynes *et al.* 2004; Tynes 2006), social distrust (Nasi *et al.* 2015), discrimination (Cowan and Mettrick 2002; Foxman and Wolf 2013), the inter-generational perpetuation of extremist ideologies (Perry 2000; Tynes 2006), and, in extreme cases, violence (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2011; for a list of deadly attacks see Freilich, Belli, and Chermak. 2011; The New America Foundation International Security Program 2015). Given the many negative repercussions associated with exposure to online hate, controlling its spread is a matter of central importance.

Online Social Control

Netiquette is often the first – and many times only – line of defense against online hate. For better or for worse, the U.S., unlike many other Western

democracies, is more lax regarding the censorship of online content that might be interpreted as hate material (Allen and Norris 2011; Hawdon, Oksanen, and Räsänen 2016). While the U.S. does place limits on some forms of online activity, (Hawdon, Oksanen, and Räsänen 2016; Bleich 2011; Gelber 2002; Walker 1994), the dissemination of material that promotes and incites hatred towards a group has been deemed permissible by the courts (Bleich 2011; Walker 1994). As a consequence, the onus of controlling the Internet falls largely on individuals that utilize particular sites or the individuals, groups, or companies that maintain them.

Netiquette can take various forms and be enacted by oneself or someone else who intervenes on behalf of another, or by a general guardian whose virtual presence alone can deter wrongdoing (Felseo and Boba 2010). When individuals attempt to enact social control online, it is often akin to what Black (1998) terms “self-help;” that is, “handling a grievance with unilateral aggression” (1988: 74). The form of self-help one engages in can vary, ranging from a statement of disapproval to the enactment of violence. Engaging in this form of social control involves risks, however. For example, DeRosier and colleagues (1994) found that siding with the victim of bullying leads to an increase in aversive behavior, and recent work by Costello, Hawdon, and Ratliff (2016) demonstrated that engaging in self-help online actually increases target antagonism, and therefore the likelihood of becoming a target. Given the risks involved, would-be social control agents must assess the potential harms of intervention, such as reprisal, lost time, wasted effort, embarrassment, or social disapproval (Dovidio *et al.* 1991; Dovidio *et al.* 2006; Thornberg 2010) before intervening.

A second form of netiquette is collective efficacy, or control enacted by others. Sampson (2001; Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997) argues that collective efficacy is present when mutual trust and a shared willingness to intervene for the common good are present. Shared expectations and mutual engagement therefore result in social control. If we apply Sampson’s concept to an online setting, collective efficacy exists when individuals jointly engage with a deviant in order to foster conformity. But while collective efficacy has been shown to reduce crime in neighborhoods (Sampson *et al.* 1997; Sampson and Raudenbush 1999; Sampson and Wikstrom 2008; Mazerolle, Wickes, and McBroom 2010), the online effect is less established. Collective efficacy, on the one hand, could

guard against online hate by sending the message to individuals occupying a virtual space that such behavior will not be tolerated. Alternatively, since trust, fundamental to collective efficacy, is generally lacking online, it may be ineffective at reducing online hate (Costello *et al.* 2016). As Sampson and colleagues note (1997: 919), individuals are unlikely to intervene on behalf of those who they do not trust. Moreover, the anonymity provided by the Internet can lower the potential costs of engaging in online hate, as shaming is only effective if one is known and their reputation is therefore at risk (see Costello *et al.* 2016 for a similar argument).

The Bystander Effect

This study is interested in understanding factors associated with prosocial bystander behavior online. The bystander effect has received ample attention in the academic arena, with most work showing that bystanders are loath to intervene when others are in jeopardy. Looking at bullying, for example, observational data show that peers are present 85% of the time during such incidents (Atlas and Pepler 1998; Craig and Pepler 1995), though intervene only 10 – 11% of the time. Self-reports of intervention largely echo these findings (Salmivalli *et al.* 1996). This raises an important question – what influences the decision to intervene on behalf of others?

A number of situational factors (Geer and Jarnecky 1973) predict the likelihood of prosocial bystander behavior, with the most consistent finding being the size of the group. Larger groups generally inhibit prosocial behavior (Latané, Nida, and Wilson 1981). This phenomenon is best explained by Latané and Darley’s (1970) “decision model,” which identifies three primary psychological processes that explain bystander inhibitions. The most salient, perhaps, is diffusion of responsibility, whereby a bystander can divide their personal responsibility for a given situation by the number of bystanders. Thus, the harm that a victim faces will only be partially felt by a given bystander. Additionally, the anonymity provided by large groups allows bystanders to rely on others to intercede (Haekins, Pepler, and Craig 2001; Darley and Latané 1968). The second process, evaluation apprehension, maintains that bystanders fear that they will be judged harshly by others for their public action, particularly if it falls short of the desired intent. This fear, magnified in front of large crowds, inhibits prosocial behavior. Finally, pluralistic ignorance, or the tendency to rely on the reactions of others when faced with an ambiguous

situation, also encourages non-intervention. If a bystander observes the inaction of other bystanders, they will likely interpret those social cues as an indication that assistance is unwarranted.

A bystander's interpretation of a given situation informs their behavior as well (Carlo and Randall 2001; Tice and Baumeister 1985). Darley and Latané (1968) describe the process that bystanders undertake before making a decision about intervening, which entails identifying a problem, deciding on a suitable remedy, and determining if they possess the skillset needed to intervene in a positive manner (Harada 1985; Latané and Rodin 1969; Shotland and Straw 1976). An assessment of the risks and rewards of intervening permeates this entire process (Dovidio *et al.* 1991; Dovidio *et al.* 2006; Bar-Tal 1976; Dozier and Miceli 1985). Prosocial behavior is most likely if potential rewards, such as bolstering one's reputation, gaining friendship, fame, or a financial recompense may result from intervention. If the probability of doing so outweighs the potential danger, embarrassment of failing, or time and energy lost intervening, intervention becomes more likely.

Other important factors that influence prosocial bystander behavior are victim characteristics, (Gaertner and Dovidio 1977) bystander characteristics (Schwartz and Clausen 1970), and characteristics of other bystanders (Bickman 1971). For instance, there is evidence that personal characteristics, such as gender (Eagly and Crowley 1986; George *et al.* 1998), motivation (Micheline, Wilson, and Messe 1975), and religious faith (Hardy and Carlo 2005) affect prosocial behavior. Moreover, bystanders are more apt to assist those who are similar to them (Levine *et al.* 2002), and witnessing others help in similar situations leads to a greater likelihood of intervention (Bryan and Test 1967; Rushton and Campbell 1977; Carlo and Randall 2001). Prosocial behavior can also be learned through interactions with family, friends, and, more broadly, one's social milieu (Wyatt and Carlo 2002).

Given what we know about prosocial bystander behavior in the physical world, we explore whether such behavior is similarly understood in cyberspace. While there is reason to believe that the motivations behind prosocial behavior might transcend context, it is also possible that the anonymity and disconnected nature of the Internet could alter the likelihood of engaging in prosocial behavior. Below we explore factors that lead to intervention when others are being targeted by online hate material.

METHODS AND DATA

We use descriptive and multivariate procedures to explore factors leading individuals to enact informal social control when they encounter hate material online. We employ an ordinal logistic regression, which is preferable when analysing a dependent variable that has ordered, categorical responses. The effect of independent variables are reported as odds ratios, which show relative changes in the odds of an outcome when an independent variable's value is increased by one unit, holding all other effects constant.

Sample

The sample consists of 647 Internet users aged 15 to 36. Data were collected during the week of January 28, 2015 from demographically balanced panels of people who voluntarily agreed to participate in research surveys. Survey Sample International (SSI) recruits potential participants through permission-based techniques such as random digit dialling and banner ads. SSI sent email invitations to a sample of panel members ages 15 to 36 stratified to reflect the U.S. population on age, gender, and geographic region. SSI provides various incentives to respondents for participating in their surveys.

Demographically balanced online panels protect against bias in online surveys because screening can eliminate respondents and panelists who have previously participated (Evans and Mathur 2005; Wansink 2001). Moreover, the recruitment and selection processes, the use of pre-panel interviews, and incentives increase the validity of responses because those who volunteer to be in the panel tend to be more serious about answering the questions (see Wansink 2001).

Dependent Variable

Informal Social Control

Our dependent variable approximates informal social control, or netiquette, enacted by bystanders online. It gauges the effect of personally enacting social control by confronting those who are being hateful online. This measure takes the average of two indicators; the first asks, "When people on social networking sites are being mean or offensive, how often do you tell the person who is being offensive to stop?" The second asks "When people on social networking sites are being mean or offensive, how often do you defend the person or group being

Table 1: Informal Social Control Online

	Never	Once in a While	Sometimes	Frequently
See Hate and Tell Perpetrator to Stop	27.6%	34%	27.5%	10.2%
See Hate and Defend Attacked	20.2%	33.6%	32.6%	13.7%

attacked?" Answers range from 1, corresponding to "never," to 4, corresponding to "frequently." The two measures are highly correlated (.65), and therefore were combined into a single indicator.

Over a quarter of respondents (28.3%) report that they never tell individuals to cease being hateful, while one-fifth (20.2%) indicate that they never defend the attacked. A sizable share of respondents (13.7%) indicate they frequently defend the attacked and over ten percent (10.2%) report they frequently tell the offender(s) to stop. A more detailed breakdown of both variables is available in Table 1.

Independent Variables

Social Bonds

Individuals with strong social bonds, both offline and online, should find it easier to enact social control online. Respondents who report stronger attachments might conclude that their actions will be reinforced by their acquaintances. Past work on online victimization shows that online attachments guard against attacks (Oksanen *et al.* 2014), and there is evidence that having a strong sense of community encourages prosocial behavior offline (Banyard 2008). Similarly, those who enact social control may feel emboldened by the guardianship of their attachments. We control for two measures of online attachment and one measure of offline attachment.

Online Attachment: First, we use a five-point scale item that asks respondents how close they feel to an online group to which they belong. A response of 5 indicates that individuals "feel very close to an online community to which they belong," while a value of 1 indicates that they feel "not close at all" to such a community. Nearly one-third (29.5%) responded with a 4 or a 5 on this item.

Second, we ask respondents how many of their close friends they interact with only online. This measure was determined using a 4-point scale. The most common response (44.3%) was that respondents interacted with "a few" friends only online, but that they also see "most of their friends offline." Over a quarter of

respondents (28%) said that they interacted with "almost none" of their close friends only online. Smaller shares that said that they interacted with "most of their close friends only online," (18.6%), or "almost all of their close friends are online" (9.1%).

Offline Attachment: We use a variable that approximates how close respondents feel to their family and friends. Responses are measured on a 5-point scale, with a 5 indicating that respondents feel "very close" to their family and friends, and a score of 1 indicating that they feel "not at all close." A majority of respondents (73.17%) reported they feel a strong attachment to their friends and family, responding with a 4 or 5. Only 8.3% of respondents indicated they have a weak bond with their family and friends with answers of 1 or 2.

Victimization/Empathy

Individuals who have been victimized by online hate might be more empathetic towards other victims, and therefore be more apt to come to their defense (Levine *et al.* 2002). Thus, we use a measure of victimization with the expectation that respondents who have been personally victimized by online hate will, in turn, be more likely to defend others who they see being victimized.

Been Target of Hate Online: We assesses whether respondents have been the target of hateful or degrading material online at any time in their life. Twenty-three percent of respondents indicate that they have been the target of hate online. Targeting pertaining to ethnicity or race was most common (9.6%). Respondents were also commonly targeted for their appearance (7.5%), religious beliefs (6.7%), sexual orientation (5.9%), political views (5.6%), nationality (5.4%), and sex/gender (4.5%).

Norm Violations

The likelihood of online intervention should, at least in part, be tied to the subjective perceptions of hate that individuals arrive at (Harada 1985; Latané and Rodin 1969; Shotland and Straw 1976). In particular, when individuals feel an expectation to act, they become

more likely to do so (DeSmet *et al.* 2014). It is probable that material that is found to violate norms of decency in an egregious fashion will elicit a stronger desire to intercede. Hence, individuals should enact social control if they find hate material particularly disturbing or distasteful.

Find Hate Disturbing: We therefore assess how disturbing respondents find online hate material they encountered using a 5-point scale ranging from a response of 1, corresponding to “not at all disturbing,” to 5, corresponding to “extremely disturbing.” A large portion of respondents said that they found the material “extremely disturbing” (20.5%) or “very disturbing” (23%). Only 4% said that the material was “not at all disturbing.” Over half said that the material they viewed was either “slightly disturbing” (15.5%) or “disturbing” (36.9%), which represents the middle response in the survey.

Self-Esteem

Prosocial behavior has been linked to one’s belief that their intervention in a situation will lead to the desired outcome (Harada 1985; Latané and Rodin 1969; Shotland and Straw 1976). Since individuals with higher self-esteem will likely have more confidence in their ability to effectively enact social control, we expect that those with high self-esteem will be more likely to engage in prosocial behavior by enacting social control online.

Self-Esteem: To measure self-esteem, we asked respondents to rate their self-esteem on a 10-point scale. They were asked how true the statement “I have high self-esteem” is about them. A score of “1” indicated that this statement is “not very true of me,” and a score of “10” indicated that is “very true of me.” It was more common for respondents to relay that they had relatively high self-esteem. In fact, over half (53.9%) responded with a score of 8 or higher. Only 8.9% responded with a score of 3 or lower. The remaining respondents fell in the middle, with responses tending to be close to 6 or 7 than 4 or 5.

Collective Efficacy

Collective efficacy has been linked to reductions in crime and violence in the physical world (Sampson *et al.* 1997). Like collective efficacy in the offline world, we expect online collective efficacy to serve as a social control mechanism. People who witness collective efficacy online might deduce that they are in a virtual

environment that is collectively monitored and protected, therefore lowering the costs of trying to enact social control themselves.

Online Collective Efficacy: We approximate communal social control in cyberspace by constructing an indicator of online collective efficacy using the average of two measures. One item asks respondents “When people on social networking sites are being mean or offensive, how often have others told the person who is being offensive to stop?” The second item asks “When people on social networking sites are being mean or offensive, how often have others defended the person or group being attacked?” Responses for both indicators range from 1, corresponding to “never,” to 4, corresponding to “frequently.” These two indicators are correlated at a value of .64. They were first tested separately, producing parallel results. Thus, they were combined into a single measure, capturing collective efficacy. Over one-fifth (21.3%) of respondents indicate that they frequently witness others telling perpetrators of hate to stop. Similarly, twenty-one percent said that they saw others defending the attacked group or person.

Online Exposure Variables

How individuals use the Internet should affect their likelihood of enacting social control online as well. We use global measures of online activity to assess the amount of time that individuals spend online, as well as how they spend that time.

Online Activity: The number of hours per day that respondents use the Internet is included. Respondents average 3.21 hours per day online. The squared term of this variable is also included to test for possible non-linear effects because it is plausible that Internet users alter their online habits with increased time online.

Social Network Usage: We asked respondents if they used a number of popular SNS in the past three months, and created a measure based on the average of those responses. Some of the most frequently used SNS are Facebook (90.7%), Twitter (53.3%), Google+ (40.4%), photo-sharing sites, such as Instagram (37.6%), and Tumblr (25.8%).

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Demographic factors may also influence the likelihood of enacting online social control, although the evidence on interventions by socio-demographic characteristics is largely mixed (Hawkins, Pepler and

Craig 2001; Eagly 1987, Eisenberg and Mussen 1989), Eisenberg and Mussen 1989; Menesini *et al.* 1997). We control for sex, minority status, age, and education, which is assessed as the highest level of education completed, ranging from less than a high school diploma to a post-graduate degree. These variables are used to gain an understanding of who is most likely to impose social control when encountering hate material online.

RESULTS

Table 2 reports the means, standard deviations, and minimum and maximum values for all variables included in the analysis. A correlation matrix, presented in the appendix, is used to assess possible sources of multicollinearity. We use a correlation above .6 as a source of concern. Education and age are positively correlated (.63). However, we entered each variable into the model separately and did not encounter problems with flipped signs or unstable results. A VIF test confirms the lack of multicollinearity. In fact, the mean VIF score is 1.19, and no individual VIF scores reach a value of 2.

Table 3 shows the results of regressing informal social control on the independent variables. The first model controls for variables that approximate social bonds, victimization, norm violations, self-esteem, and

collective efficacy, and the second model introduces online exposure and socio-demographic variables.

Interestingly, all of the variables are significant in the hypothesized direction in the first model. Those who have strong bonds, both online and offline, are more likely to impose social control online. Those who report feeling close to an online community are 1.23 times more likely to defend someone being targeted by hate online (OR=1.23, $p<.001$), relative to those who do not report a similar closeness. Likewise, respondents who interact more regularly with close friends online are 1.51 times as likely to engage in such online behavior (OR=1.51, $p<.001$). Having a close relationship with friends and family offline also correlates with enacting online social control (OR=1.24, $p<.001$). These results are expected, given that strong social bonds can serve as a protective mechanism for would-be defenders.

Both our measure of collective efficacy and our measure of self-esteem perform as anticipated. In fact, those who encounter online collective efficacy are more than twice as likely to attempt to impose social control themselves (OR=2.18, $p<.001$). This finding suggests that potential defenders are encouraged by others who are engaging in analogous behavior. People who report higher levels of self-esteem are more likely to defend online victims as well (OR=1.07, $p<.05$), although the effect is rather weak. This supports the notion that

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of All Variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min. Value	Max. Value
Informal Social Control	2.30	0.87	1	4
Close to Online Community	3.13	1.42	1	6
Interact with Friends Online	2.09	0.91	1	4
Close to Family & Friends	4.04	1.17	0.17	5
Online Collective Efficacy	2.73	0.80	1	4
Self Esteem	7.23	2.34	1	10
Been Target of Hate Online = 1	0.23	0.42	0	1
Find Hate Online Disturbing	3.40	1.10	1	5
Hours Online	3.21	0.81	1	4
Hours Online ²	10.98	4.73	1	16
Social Network Usage	0.37	0.21	0	1
Female = 1	0.50	0.50	0	1
White = 1	0.66	0.47	0	1
Age	24.66	6.19	15	36
Education	2.81	1.24	1	5

Table 3: Ordinal Logistic Regression Analysis of Informal Social Control Online (Odds Ratios and Standard Errors)

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.
Informal Social Control				
Close to Online Community	1.23***	0.07	1.23***	0.07
Interact with Friends Online	1.51***	0.12	1.49***	0.12
Close to Family & Friends	1.24***	0.08	1.20**	0.08
Online Collective Efficacy	2.18***	0.22	2.18***	0.22
Self-Esteem	1.07*	0.03	1.08*	0.03
Been Target of Hate Online = 1	2.84***	0.45	2.91***	0.47
Find Hate Online Disturbing	1.54***	0.10	1.52***	0.10
Hours Online	-----	-----	2.98*	1.85
Hours Online ²	-----	-----	0.84*	0.09
Social Network Usage	-----	-----	1.59	0.55
Female = 1	-----	-----	0.82	0.12
White = 1	-----	-----	1.05	0.16
Age	-----	-----	1.00	0.02
Education	-----	-----	0.89	0.07
LR X ²	226.75		235.65	
Log Pseudolikelihood	-1089.37		-1080.53	
N	647		647	

individuals with a higher assessment of themselves might deduce that their intervention will result in the positive outcome, which in this case is a reduction in online hate.

Those who have been the target of hate online are nearly three times as likely to defend others (OR=2.84, $p < .001$), compared to those who have not been attacked. This is the strongest effect in the model, and suggests that individuals who have been attacked likely empathize with, and thus try to protect, others who are similarly being attacked. Finally, the breeching of social norms also spurs the enactment of social control online. Respondents who report that they find online hate material more disturbing are 1.54 times more likely to defend others (OR=1.54, $p < .001$), relative to those who are less troubled by such material.

The second model introduces variables that gauge online exposure and socio-demographic indicators. The findings regarding online exposure and enacting social control are mixed. First, a non-linear, inverted U-shaped relationship between the number of hours per day a respondent spends online and netiquette emerges. That is, initially spending more time online correlates with an increased likelihood of defending others who are being attacked by a factor of almost three (OR=2.98, $p < .05$). The relationship reverses,

though, as respondents spend more time online (OR=.84, $p < .05$). One plausible explanation for this is that individuals attend to more mundane online tasks as they spend additional time online. As they spend increasing amounts of time online, they are probably visiting more commercially oriented sites and therefore would be less likely to be observe situations requiring intervention in defense of others. Counter to expectations, social network usage does not have a significant relationship with enacting social control, although the coefficient is in the hypothesized direction. The socio-demographic indicators are all non-significant. The results from the first model remain constant in the second model, with only slight variation in the size of the respective effects.

DISCUSSION

Intervening for the benefit of a stranger carries risks, some great, others rather mundane. Those who intervene might place themselves in physical danger, or they could face the prospect of losing time, wasting energy, or being subject to public ridicule or social backlash. Given the many hazards associated with prosocial bystander behavior, we should not be surprised to learn that most bystanders choose the path-of-least-resistance, free-riding, upon encountering a social dilemma.

The bystander effect has been observed in a number of staged emergencies, as well as instances involving interpersonal violence, bullying, and actual emergencies. Understanding the bystander effect in cyberspace, though, poses new challenges. Namely, interactions are distinct in the physical and virtual realms, and cyber-audiences are decidedly less "present." While social media, and the Internet more generally, offer avenues to grow ones social networks, it also offers a profound sense of anonymity. Thus, we are left with the question of whether what we know about bystander behavior in the physical world is germane to the online domain. This study addresses that issue by focusing on how bystanders react to witnessing online hate material.

Our results demonstrate some important insights into the enactment of netiquette, as well as some interesting parallels between offline and online bystander prosocial behavior. For instance, we find that those who have stronger, more robust support systems are more likely to intervene on behalf of individuals targeted by hate material. This supports our first hypothesis, aligning with work showing that a strong sense of community correlates with prosocial behavior offline (Banyard 2008). When individuals feel a stronger sense of community, they become more likely to engage with factors that could threaten that unity. Additionally, having strong bonds can bolster bystander prosocial behavior by diminishing evaluation apprehension.

Our second hypothesis, that prior victimization will generate empathy, in turn leading to social control, also received support. In fact, this was one of the strongest effects in our model. Individuals who were personally targeted by hate material in the past were nearly three times as likely to defend others facing similar attacks. This mirrors results that show empathetic interventions in the offline world (Christy and Voigt 1994). Thus, in varying contexts, the ability to relate to a victim is an important correlate of prosocial bystander behavior.

Next, individuals who reported higher levels of self-esteem were more likely to engage in prosocial behavior. An important and consistent factor found to relate to intervention in the physical world is ones self-perception – more specifically, ones appraisal of their ability to intervene in a manner that will alleviate a perceived problem (Christy and Voigt 1994; Banyard 2008). This finding demonstrates that individuals with higher self-esteem place more confidence in their ability to intervene in a manner that will diminish online hate.

Finally, we hypothesized that collective efficacy would lead to prosocial bystander behavior. Once again, our results supported out suppositions. First, when individuals reported witnessing others enacting social control, they were twice as likely to behave similarly. Past work demonstrates that witnessing others providing help in similar situations is an important predictor of personal behavior (Bryan and Test 1967; Rushton and Campbell 1977; Carlo and Randall 2001). This finding also speaks to the ability of a collectivity to pursue conformity and engage with transgressors. While collective efficacy has been found to diminish crime in neighborhoods, its ability to do so on the Internet has remained less clear. This study suggests, though, that collective efficacy is important online as well.

Other noteworthy findings of this study are that individuals exhibit prosocial behavior more readily if they find the hate material more disturbing. This is similar to work showing that individuals are disposed to intervene in situations that are perceived as calamitous (Fischer *et al.* 2011). We also show that online behaviors are relevant. While ones social network usage is not a significant predictor of prosocial bystander behavior, the amount of time spent online is, demonstrating a curvilinear relationship whereby individuals are more likely to confront hate material during their initial time online, but retire to more routine tasks over time. Finally, we find that socio-demographic characteristics are not important correlates of informal social control online.

LIMITATIONS

Our study has a few limitations that merit mention. For one, our sample is limited to individuals between the ages of 15 and 36. There is good reason for targeting this demographic, as younger adults spend more time online and are thus are more likely to encounter hate material online. In addition, there is evidence that this group is the most vulnerable to extremism, and hate groups actively target younger users. As a result of seeing hate material with more regularity, younger individuals might react to it differently than an older demographic, however. Even so, this places limitations on our sample.

Second, we used demographically balanced panel data, allowing for representative demographics of U.S. citizens. It is possible, however, that panel participants may have characteristics that differentiate them from individuals who chose not to participate. While this is a

limitation of all survey-based research and we believe our sample is representative of theoretically important groups, we cannot determine if other biases related to this sampling procedure are present. We are nevertheless confident, given the frequent use of panel data for studies such as ours, that our results are valid and important.

Third, our survey uses short instruments to measure various concepts. Additional indicators would, of course, increase the reliability of our measures. Further, several of our measures are based on the subjective interpretation of our respondents. For instance, we ask individuals to determine if they witnessed someone else being victimized by hate material online, and hate material can of course be perceived differently. This limits the generalizability of our findings.

CONCLUSIONS

We are only beginning to understand the enactment of informal social control online. With hate material being an unfortunate, and increasing, danger online, understanding the circumstances under which people try to diminish it is imperative. This work begins to add to that understanding. We uncover several interesting findings regarding social bonds, victimization, self-esteem, collective efficacy and netiquette. We hope that future research will continue to address this important topic, as the need to do so is ever-increasing with the spread of online hate flourishing.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Correlation Matrix of All Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Informal Social Control (1)	1							
Close to Online Community (2)	0.20	1						
Interact with Friends Online (3)	0.25	0.20	1					
Close to Family & Friends (4)	0.15	0.12	0.01	1				
Online Collective Efficacy (5)	0.30	-0.01	0.02	0.05	1			
Been Target of Hate Online = 1 (6)	0.28	0.13	0.14	-0.01	0.05	1		
Find Hate Online Disturbing (7)	0.27	-0.02	0.11	0.04	0.10	0.02	1	
Self-Esteem (8)	0.10	0.12	-0.01	0.24	0.00	-0.04	0.01	1
Hours Online (9)	0.07	0.04	0.10	-0.11	0.09	0.04	0.05	-0.09
Hours Online ² (10)	0.06	0.05	0.09	-0.12	0.08	0.06	0.04	-0.07
Social Network Usage (11)	0.13	0.08	0.04	-0.01	0.09	0.12	0.12	-0.03
Female = 1 (12)	-0.01	-0.02	-0.05	-0.05	0.12	-0.06	0.12	-0.15
White = 1 (13)	0.04	0.04	0.02	0.18	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.02
Age (14)	-0.01	0.06	0.03	-0.07	-0.05	0.07	0.04	0.10
Education (15)	-0.08	0.03	-0.02	-0.17	-0.02	0.03	-0.01	0.00

We believe that future researchers can expand on this study by evaluating bystander-victim relationships online. Work in the physical world demonstrates that bystanders are more likely to help people that they are acquainted with, or who share similar demographic characteristics. Examining these dynamics online could prove insightful. The current study lacked the ability to determine such relationships. Further, it would be telling if the size of someone’s social network was examined to gain an understanding of how responsibility is diffused in an online setting based on group size. Do online bystanders similarly refrain from prosocial behavior if there are more people present in an online setting, as has been observed in offline settings? Once more, our current data did not allow us to address this question. We hope that researchers will address these and other questions in an effort to further our knowledge on online hate, and ultimately, discern ways to reduce its spread.

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Appendix 1: Correlation Matrix of All Variables (continued)

	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Hours Online (9)	1						
Hours Online ² (10)	0.99	1					
Social Network Usage (11)	0.22	0.23	1				
Female = 1 (12)	-0.02	-0.02	0.12	1			
White = 1 (13)	-0.06	-0.05	0.00	-0.02	1		
Age (14)	0.17	0.18	0.02	0.03	0.11	1	
Education (15)	0.20	0.21	0.07	0.05	0.01	0.63	1

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