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# Examining the Motives Behind Performative Allyship

Salena Keys-Kukoricza  
*Portland State University*

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PERFORMANCE ACTIVISM, INTERNAL & EXTERNAL MOTIVATION

Examining The Motivations Behind Performative Allyship

by

Salena Keys-Kukoricza

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Dr. Michael Christopher

Portland State University

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### **Abstract**

In this literature review, I investigated the potential motivations and consequences of performative allyship. Performative Allyship can be characterized as a social status in which one exhibits a feigned display of support for known causes and social movements. The main issue surrounding performative allyship is the possible negative impact that it has on disadvantaged group members. Furthermore, researchers have encountered challenges in rendering the motivation behind allyship behaviors, with the current landscape and social environment. With the rise in cancel culture, fear of seeming prejudiced in a social circumstance may be attributed to individuals acting in allyship behaviors. Cancel culture can be defined as a collective movement that penalizes individuals who question socially accepted norms. The cancellation of famous author J.K Rowling is examined, as well as specific correlations between cancel culture and performance allyship. There are various gaps within the literature surrounding performance allyship. Future research may look into constructing a performance allyship measure and examine how to leverage social conformity or look at when it is useful versus when it is being utilized for one's own personal gain.

## Introduction

Currently, we are living in a very transformative time period with the fight for change at the forefront. Acts of protests and activism are ever present, and movements like *Black Lives Matter*, *The Trevor Project*, and *The Me Too Movement* have emerged. Despite the impactful and inspirational nature of these movements, other challenges persist and come about. Researchers have found it difficult to interpret the motivations behind non-prejudiced behaviors. Are these behaviors genuine or are they a product of change within the social environment (Plant et al., 1998)? Fear of appearing prejudiced in a social context may account for individuals' willingness to perform non-prejudiced behaviors (Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2018). Performative activism or allyship can be described as an inauthentic display of support for a known cause, and a form of social status (Blankschaen, 2016; Halverson 2021). This concept of genuine allyship is multifaceted and consists of a myriad of conceptualizations, bringing about various intricacies and complexities.

To fully encapsulate and understand what performative allyship is and its ramifications, we must first look at the notion of social change. Kutlaca and Radke (2023) define social change in regards to intergroup relations and the strain and conflict over power between lower-status groups and higher-status groups. Lower-status groups are often defined as underprivileged groups such as women, racial/ethnic minorities, and LGBTQ+. Higher status groups often include more privileged groups such as men, white individuals, and heterosexuals (Kutlaca & Radke, 2023). Collective action occurs when a group comes together to better their conditions (Radke et al., 2020). A key component within collective action is the inclination to achieve better outcomes for not only one's self, but it also takes into consideration fellow group members. The key issue with performative allyship is that it is associated with engaging in specific behaviors

for the individuals own self-gain (Kutlaca & Radke, 2023). Furthermore, it suggests that those who encompass performative allyship have no inclination towards the goal of equality.

In the literature it has been found that action within disadvantaged groups is not enough for social change (Kutlaca & Radke, 2023). Social change must also encompass allyship from those who are more privileged. One pivotal aspect that should be noted is the dichotomous environment and culture that we currently are living in. Cancel culture is a popularized phenomenon, where individuals or brands are essentially excommunicated or ostracized for saying something that is offensive or of an unpopular opinion (Kalina, 2020). This construct is intended to strengthen social norms, and utilize fear to regulate narratives that are counter-productive to the movement and progression (Kalina, 2020). If an individual has an opinion that is counter to a popularized narrative within the current political or societal climate, they are subject to cancellation. Cancel culture evokes dissonance through the desire to conform and the opposing desire to express how one really feels, and may account for the performative behaviors among individuals.

It should be noted that the intention within this research is not to discredit activism, allyship, or any specific movement. Furthermore, it is not intended to defend specific individual's actions in the mainstream media or bring shame upon anyone. The purpose is to merely shed light and bring awareness to aspects that may go unseen. The aim of this literature review is to uncover the issues rooted within performance allyship; there is limited research looking at the motives or consequences behind it. Throughout this review we will examine the origins of performative allyship behaviors, give historical context into why performance may be a means to survival, consider the current literature that exists surrounding performative allyship, and look at the current gaps for future research.

## **Allyship**

To thoroughly understand the phenomenon that is performative allyship, we must first examine the concept of allyship itself to gain clarity on what it is not. An ally can generally be defined as an advantaged group individual who embraces egalitarian principles (Ashburn-Nardo, 2018; Broido 2000; Radke et al., 2020). Various characteristics and developmental processes go into an ally's identity and the conceptualization has been expanded throughout the years. Broido (2000) conducted an innovative study attempting to understand undergraduate students' journey towards becoming social justice allies. It was found that individuals had existing viewpoints surrounding equality and egalitarianism and also viewed society as individualistic. Furthermore, access to information surrounding social justice issues and deep reflection were pivotal factors in guiding them to identify as allies.

Edwards (2006) would later expand on this conceptualization of allyship. His aim in his research was to distinguish between what was effective vs. ineffective within allies. He recognized an association between an ally's actions and their motivations, and suggested three developmental stages of allyship. The first stage begins with an 'ally for self-interest', where an individual's motivation tends to be driven by the yearning to defend a loved one. The second stage is an 'ally for altruism'. Within this stage, an individual's awareness of privilege starts to emerge, and with that, feelings of guilt usually tend to surface, becoming a motivating factor when engaging in allyship behaviors. The third stage is an 'ally for social justice.' Within the social justice stage, allies are collaborating with disadvantaged groups to help end systematic oppression. This research would catapult the beginning stages of a conversation within literature on the issues that may ensue surrounding an individual's intention behind allyship. Radke et al. (2020) would later argue not all advantaged group members who take part in actions for

disadvantaged group members are driven by the aforementioned aspects. They contended that an individual may act for their own personal needs, and if that were the case then they could not be considered an ally. Radke and Kutlaca (2023) would later attempt to conceptualize the phenomenon of performance allyship and examine the motivations behind it.

Performative allyship, is a complex entity containing levels of depth. On the surface of performance, the desire to conform is observed. Digging a little deeper, we find an individual's identity and ego. With that we will also examine what ensues when an individual's performance is threatened. However, let us first begin with exploring the roots of where performance began.

### **The History Behind Performance**

Performance or performativity was first conceptualized by English philosopher J.L. Austin in the 1950's, and then expanded upon by multiple authors (Butler 1990; Hadley 2022, Loxley, 2007). Austin drew attention to the fact that our spoken words could be performative. His interpretation was centered around linguistics, and the idea that words can do things (Butler 1990; Loxley 2007). Throughout his process, Austin identified three distinctions of speech type: the locutionary, the illocutionary, and the perlocutionary. The locutionary expression he specifies as the action of saying something (Austin, 1962). The illocutionary expression is the action in saying something, and perlocutionary speech is the action that often results in significant impact on others (Lloyd, 2019). Gill (2019) summarized Austin's ideas best, stating that when we have specific words for aspects and we are attempting to find the right words to use, we are not necessarily looking at the words or meanings, but the perceptions that the words create.

In the manner of theatrical performance, there is a stage with specific acts and actors portraying roles based on a script. Theoretical performance may be compared to everyday social interaction. Sociologist Erving Goffman (1956) was the first to introduce the concept of social

performance (Smith, 2011). Within his research, he observed specific underpinnings of subconscious social rules as well as intrinsic modes of behavior and paralleled them to a theatrical performance (Smith, 2011). At the core of Goffman's ideology is that the self is a product of its performance to others (Lloyd, 2019; Smith, 2011). He says that individuals will govern their responses and interactions to others to produce the correct result within their audience (Goffman, 1956). With Goffman's ideas in mind, let us examine our current landscape, activism and change are ever present and promoted throughout the masses. There are specific ideas that are more popularized than others. It would make sense to avoid stating unpopular opinions in the hopes of avoiding negative feedback from the masses.

### **Positive Reinforcement**

When investigating the motives behind any form of behavior, Skinner's reinforcement theory should be considered. Skinner's reinforcement theory says that behavior is based on its implications or consequences (Skinner, 2014). For example, if an individual progressively behaves in a certain way, and is repeatedly affirmed positively, then this individual will do it again. However, if the individual progressively behaves a certain way and is repeatedly affirmed negatively, the individual will not do it again. This theory may be connected to societal norms, because within certain cultures some behaviors could be considered the norm or acknowledged positively but in other cultures it could be considered offensive and negatively affirmed or punished.

To fully grasp the impact of reinforcement, we must first understand what aversive control is. Aversive control can be defined as any circumstance where an individual changes their behavior due to some form of stimulus that causes discomfort to them (Perone, 2003). This could simply be putting on a jacket due to a drop in temperature. It is just as easy to specify instances



where aversive control gives individuals an advantage versus disadvantage (Perone, 2003). Past studies indicate that it is quite difficult to differentiate between positive and negative reinforcement as majority of the time, the outcome is the same (Perone, 2003). However, it has been argued that reinforcement promotes optimism and allows society to live free from any form of negative punishment. When examining the impact reinforcements have on a cultural level, metacontingencies should be considered.

The term metacontingency is described as the interlocking of behavioral circumstances and their outcome (Glen, 1991). In other words, this occurs when a coordinated group with the same behaviors has an impact on another individual (Guimaraes, 2019). This definition could also be in reference to societal norms. When examining metacontingencies, the term “ethical self-control is utilized often. Individuals might have an impulsive response depending on environmental factors. In this case, the interlocking behavior consequences of a group of individuals (Guimaraes, 2019).

Now that we have some context in metacontingencies, let us examine them in the context of performance activism. A norm in general can be described as beliefs or philosophies that are shared among group members (Kutlaca et al., 2021). Norms notably wield influence over individuals when they are prominent. Within society exists specific norms that we abide by, and with the information provided, we could suggest that when the masses have one opinion it becomes a part of the environment and may influence the behaviors of other individuals. Furthermore, with the cultural landscape as it is today, with activism at the center, and the implications of not succumbing (i.e., canceling of an individual or another form of negative punishment), it is no wonder why performative behaviors are at the front line in culture today.

### **Internal and External Motivation**

In a 1998 study, researchers Plant and Devine (1998) explored individuals' motives behind non-prejudiced behaviors. Specifically, internal motivation to non-prejudiced and external motivation to non-prejudiced behaviors. Researchers defined internal non-prejudice motivation as internally significant, and personal, whereas external non-prejudice motivation was considered to be a consequence of social pressures to conform to social norms of non-prejudice (Plant & Devine, 1998). As indicated previously, the distinction between allyship and performative allyship is based around an individual's reasoning for engaging in non-prejudiced behaviors. The concept of allyship is rooted in dedication to egalitarianism, and performative allyship is rooted in gratifying personal needs (Kutlaca & Radke., 2023). Internal motivation may be correlated to allyship, and external motivation may be correlated to performative allyship, and that motivation is conveyed through various other behaviors.

In a recent study conducted in the Netherlands that aimed at expanding the internal and external concepts theorized by Plant and Devine (1998), researchers broke participants down into further subgroups (Bamberg & Verkuyten, 2022). It was found that the majority of the participants acted in non-prejudiced behaviors due to a personal commitment to egalitarianism and fear of social consequence if exhibiting prejudiced behaviors. Social consequence could equate to some form of negative punishment or excommunication of an individual. In the modern era, social consequence can be observed on a grander scale, within the happenings of mass media.

### **The Media's Influence and Cancel Culture**

James Baldwin states that the media weakens our ability to see the world for what it is, and see ourselves for what we are (Peck, 2017). By definition, the media is the communication of the masses. There are three key pivotal varieties of media that are utilized in modern day, and

they are as follows: social media, web media, and news media. Of the three forms, social media distinguishes itself from the rest. Social media has given us the ability to interact with individuals all over the world, allowed space for cultural evolution within the technological sector, and set the stage for the rise in transformative change and social movements (Velasco, 2020).

However, there are ramifications to social media that need to be considered. We as a society are glued to our phones, and the line between reality and the digital realm is unclear (Velasco, 2020). Sociologist Manuel Castells (2005) describes the current digital age and the way we interact as *hypersociality*. He states that individuals utilize multiple technological aspects of communication throughout their day to day lives, meaning that technology and communication have in essence become intertwined (Castells, 2005). With the convergence of technology within society, there is a multitude of information being exchanged and absorbed on various platforms. As a result, there has been a rise in transformative change and social movements and specific collective groups have developed around these social movements (Velasco, 2020). Social media at its core has become a playground of information where individuals and groups alike have a battle royale to see who can outsmart the other. There is an accumulation of thoughts and opinions being thrown around ubiquitously, and as a result, cancel culture has been born.

Though there is little literature that examines cancel culture, it certainly has a role to play in how individuals move throughout society. Velasco (2020) describes cancel culture as a capricious collective movement that polices individuals who question loose norms of what is socially acceptable. Furthermore, he equates it to a product of ‘wokeism.’ According to Beiner (2020), wokeism refers to the idea that the world is made up of social constructs and circumscribed by power, oppression, and group identity.

Studies have shown that it is a basic human need to reside in a group setting (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Furthermore, there is a phenomenon by name of *groupthink* that may occur within groups. The term groupthink was coined by Irving L. Janis (1982), and can be defined as when a group adheres to specific perceptions or opinions that depict the perceived group consensus. This usually occurs without any form of critical reflection or rationale (Janis, 1982). In his book, *Groupthink* (1982), Janis states that the more agreeability and camaraderie within a group, the higher the risk that self-reliant critical thought will be replaced by groupthink, and as a result will illicit irrational and dehumanizing conduct towards anyone not in agreeance with the group or outgroups.

Groupthink carries with it similarities to aspects of cancel culture, but on a wider scale. With the ability of social media to reach a worldwide audience, the impact that cancel culture had is monumental. In order to feel a sense of belonging or connection, we as a society may be relinquishing our own autonomy and critical thought to avoid ostracism. Alperstein (2019) illustrates a virtual collective consciousness where all beliefs and perceptions are integrated on social media, and Velasco (2020) compares it to an echo chamber which is an environment where an individual only interacts with their own opinions and beliefs. This environment is formed by individuals' own personal algorithms on social media. Some social media platforms even capitalize upon this personalized algorithm model. Included in those who are specifically targeted by the cancel culture movement are celebrities and public figures alike. These individuals are, in effect, a part of the intrinsic narrative that is presented by worldwide media, inserting them as non-autonomous actors into whatever story is most pertinent to the media's rapid trend cycle. They help sustain it, whether they want to or not. Additionally, the public feels a sense of ownership over celebrities and public figures, ironically, due to their social status and

power; they can be stripped of their social clout at any moment by the public, who feels as if they gave it to them in the first place, and therefore stripped of their autonomy. As a result, they are compared against extremified social norms and, when they are inevitably unable to reach the public's standard for them, are subjected to extreme public scrutiny (nappyheadedjojoba, 2023). In the context of performance, it is no wonder that there is an essential need to perform, as a way to survive; The consequences could be detrimental to an individual's safety and well-being.

### **Case Study: The Cancellation of JK Rowling**

#### **Who is J.K. Rowling?**

One of the more well-known public figures to be canceled in mainstream media is Joanne Rowling, widely known by the pen name J.K. Rowling. She is a British author who is most notorious for writing the Harry Potter fantasy series, and is considered to be one of the most successful authors of all time (Phelps-Roper, 2023). However as of late she is known as being canceled by the media for controversial comments she has made surrounding gender. This is made quite evident by the articles and stories that pop up when her name is put into a google search.

Rowling was born in Yates, United Kingdom on July 31st 1965. (jkrowling, n.d.). Rowling had always wanted to be a writer from a young age, and had always surrounded herself with books. She graduated with her bachelors at Exeter University, and would later go on to work as a researcher at Amnesty International (jkrowling, n.d.). In the 1990's, she envisioned the idea of Harry Potter whilst sitting on a train to Manchester. Over the next several years, Rowling would outline all seven books, and get published in the year 1997 (jkrowling, n.d.). The Harry Potter franchise would go on to become one of the most successful franchises of a generation. Numerous fans have said that Harry Potter has helped them through dark times in childhood and

gave them a sign of hope. The books have been praised for themes encompassing acceptance and celebration of an individual's differences (Phelps-Roper, 2023), and Rowling herself was acclaimed for creating such a vast world. However, her standing with the public was damaged when Rowling decided to express her unpopular opinions surrounding gender and sex.

### **What did J.K. Rowling Do?**

Her first appearance in the realm of gender disputes came in 2018, when she liked a tweet posted by a female Labour Party member that said “men in dresses get brocialist solidarity I never had. That’s misogyny!” In this specific instance, the like was pardoned by Rowling’s publicist who said it was a “clumsy and middle-aged moment” (Whitson, 2021). There was some ensuing backlash, however nothing could compare to the onslaught she got for her tweets to come. On June 6, 2020, Rowling retweeted a story with the statement underneath saying: “‘People who menstruate’. I’m sure there used to be a word for those people. Someone help me out. Wumben? Wimpund? Woomud?” She continued on with a more explicit statement of her values:

“If sex isn’t real, there’s no same-sex attraction. If sex isn’t real, the lived reality of women globally is erased. I know and love trans people, but erasing the concept of sex removes the ability of many to meaningfully discuss their lives. It isn’t hate to speak the truth” (Rowling, 2020).

She would go on to mention that she has been an avid supporter of trans individuals for decades, and that she has always felt a sense of camaraderie with them as they are vulnerable in the same ways that women are. She continued by saying “my life has been shaped by being female. I do not believe it’s hateful to say so” (Rowling, 2020).

A few days later on June 10, 2020, she would release a statement on her website. In this post she covers various aspects of her beliefs and her reasoning for supporting Maya Forstater, a tax specialist who had lost her job due some comments she made that were deemed transphobic, and her awareness of what would ensue if she spoke publicly when she spoke out. In this statement, she notes:

“I want trans women to be safe. At the same time, I do not want to make natal girls and women less safe. When you throw open the doors of bathrooms and changing rooms to any man who believes or feels he’s a woman – and, as I’ve said, gender confirmation certificates may now be granted without any need for surgery or hormones – then you open the door to any and all men who wish to come inside. That is the simple truth.”

(Rowling, 2020).

### **The Backlash**

What followed was the excommunication of J.K Rowling from the world of literary and social prowess. Individuals who were once her fans denounced her and asked that her books be banned (Phelps-Roper, 2023). Fansites devoted to Harry Potter no longer affiliated themselves with Rowling. Some fans went as far as to burn their Harry Potter books (Phelps-Roper, 2023). She was called a TERF (Trans-exclusionary radical feminist) by many, and compared to Voldemort (the villain from her popular franchise). There were also statements issued by specific celebrities associated with Harry Potter such as Daniel Radcliffe, Emma Watson, and Rupert Grint, who all strongly disagreed with her comments and apologized for any pain that they had caused.

### **Analysis and Relation to Performative Allyship**

In the case of J.K. Rowling, she made comments on an already very “polarized” topic (Phelps-Roper, 2023), sex and gender, and she offended the trans community. The opinions expressed were against the grain of the masses, and as a result she received backlash. Rowling describes individuals who burn books as having the inability to debate or attempt to rationalize others' opinions. While the validity and proportion of the public’s reaction to her comments is debated, and perceptions of Rowling’s comments remain on a spectrum ranging from being mal-intended to simply being in poor taste, it is important to note that the widespread assumption of maliciousness on Rowling’s part is indicative of groupthink. As indicated earlier, one of the potential consequences of groupthink is irrational thought and dehumanization of others with differing opinions (Janis, 1985). Individuals who fall prey to groupthink believe undoubtedly that their beliefs are intrinsically moral (Janis, 1985). Rowling comments that individuals embody an ultimate belief, so much so that they dismiss or destroy anything oppositional (Phelps-Roper, 2023). Individuals who have ingrained beliefs believe that they are doing the right thing and that they are warranted in their beliefs (Phelps-Roper, 2023). People who hold such morally charged beliefs are therefore vulnerable to an immense amount of identity threat when those beliefs are challenged.

What is applicable here, is that anyone could argue anything and find reasons to attempt to convince others that they are right and valid in what they believe. When an individual's idea of who they are is threatened, they feel an intense tension about their identity. The impact and reactions to specific thoughts or beliefs however are questionable. The response Rowling received after expressing her opinions around sex and gender are obviously not favorable, and



unfortunately, not singular. There have been various public figures who have been subjected to the cancel culture movement.

When exploring Rowling's comments and individuals' reactions to her comments, a common theme at the root of this strenuous agitation and encapsulated under all of the tension is a yearning to be seen and maintain one's own identity. As described previously, the cancel culture movement adheres to a 'wokeism' ideology. It asserts that society is made up of social constructs, and confined to power, oppression and group identity (Beiner, 2020). Embedded within these social constructs is gender. Gender performativity was coined by Butler (1990). Similar to performative allyship, it finds its roots in Austin's original interpretation of performativity stating that words can do things. Gender performance can be looked at as an aspect of doing or performing socially. The intersection between performative allyship and gender performance are no mere coincidence. Blankschaen (2016) argued that allyship is a social status. If you were to look at the tension between Rowling and those who are upset with her comments, both parties' identities are being threatened. There are emotions and individual identity tied within this dispute. When an individual's livelihood or identity is questioned or doubted, intense emotions can arise, ranging from rage to ostracism. This could be compared to an individual questioning one's own religion. In Rowling's case, she expressed that she felt her womanhood and identity were being threatened. She received backlash because others felt their identities were being threatened by her comments. Thus, it can be argued that the conflict here is simply between each side's performance of their perceived identities, and their emotional attachments to these identities.

There are various layers to performance. The surface level exists in the performance of the masses to cancel whatever is not the popular opinion or social norm of the moment. At this

moment activism and allyship are at the forefront, and it is difficult to perceive who is genuine in their stance versus who is performing due to their environment. Cancel culture is dangerous, because it does not allow any opinion other than the opinion of the masses.

### **Performance Within a Racial Landscape**

Though this literature examines performative allyship in relation to all minorities in general, with the overwhelming amount of literature dedicated to themes surrounding Black and white individuals. It is foremost important to assign a portion of this review that addresses the racial landscape. The underlying hostility and tension that is embedded within the racial constructs of the United States goes back centuries with enslavement being at its core. Enslavement has been around since ancient times, however western civilization brought a whole new meaning to the word (Lewis, 1998). They created a new more malignant approach based around ideologies surrounding what makes individuals more worthy than the other. By this means came Voltaire's enlightenment mythology, which stated that Black individuals were inadequate or lesser than by design and that white individuals were superior (Lewis, 1998).

In this ideological context, Black and white have now become identities with meanings attached to them. Goffman (1956) refers to racial characteristics as "personal fonts" within an individual. Going further and mentioning that a person's appearance can indicate social status. In the documentary *I am Not Your Negro* (2017), narrator and author, James Baldwin states that the world has never really been white, and that white is more of metaphor for power. Further he goes on to say that white individuals need to ask themselves why they created the negro in the first place (Peck, 2017). It would appear that racial constructs were created to empower white individuals.

With the tumultuous history of Black and white individuals, there are underpinnings of various emotions at play. Past studies have shown that guilt, shame, fear, and other emotions can be a motivation for white individuals to adhere to allyship behaviors (Kutlaca & Radke, 2023). This phenomenon has been referred to as “guilty white liberal” (Tatum, 2003) or “white guilt” (Wohl et al., 2006). This was described earlier when referencing Edwards (2006) second developmental stage of allyship, the ‘ally for altruism.’ During this stage he explains that guilt is a pivotal motivator, but emphasizes that it cannot be the only motivator. Guilt alone will not change systemic oppression (Edwards, 2006; Kimmel, 2003). Furthermore, past studies have indicated that when a group is acting out of primarily guilt, it promotes avoidance of the actual issue (Kutlaca & Radke, 2023). Kutlaca and Radke (2023) suggest that guilt motivation is centered around escaping the negative emotions that come from actual acknowledgement of racially motivated crimes, as well as an attempt at restoring the image of the advantaged group (i.e., the white community). This was also theorized by Janis (1982) in regards to why groupthink occurs. He explains, that it is collective effort by the group to preserve self-esteem as well as emotional wellness (Janis, 1982)

When advantaged groups members engage in actions for the disadvantaged they will do the easiest and most convenient of actions (Kutlaca & Radke, 2023). This could equate to individuals posting a black square on their instagram to show their support of a cause, posting about Black individuals who have lost their lives to police brutality, or putting a *Black Lives Matter* signs on their lawn. However, it should be noted that all acts listed are external and for public individuals to see. Kutlaca and Radke (2023) state that performative allyship presupposes that individuals involve themselves in actions that are simple and visible to the public eye.

Furthermore, if we return to Goffman's ideas surrounding social interaction and performance, he says that we as individuals manage responses based on the audience (Goffman, 1956).

As a society we have not healed from our histories, instead of facing internal wounds we face outwards and worry about how we are being perceived by others. There is not much exploration on the rooted issue; the lack of awareness and ability to look within oneself to recognize our blindspots. In essence, we give meanings to external stimuli such as rank, clothing, gender, age, size, posture, speech patterns, etc. (Goffman, 1956). In *Deliberative Acts*, author Arabella Lyon contends that identity could be framed in the form of charming or magical (Lyon, 2013). Hesford (2021) expands on that and makes the connection within performative white allyship, stating that it could be considered charming and magical thinking. Simply identifying as an ally does not necessarily make an individual an ally, and this is where the danger of identifying as something comes into play, because if there is no action to accompany the identification then those are essentially just empty words. This is similar to J.L. Austin's early interpretation of performativity mentioned above, stating that when attempting to find the right words to present a specific perception it may take away from the actual meaning.

### **Case Study: Portland, OR**

Portland, OR can be said to be an oasis of progressive culture. However, lurking just below the surface are the underpinnings of a long history of racial injustice and inequity. Prominent knowledge has been intentionally concealed, resulting in the erasure of significant history within the psyches of its inhabitants (CBS News, 2021). Therefore, it may be argued that rather than progressive culture, at its core lies performative culture. In order to fully grasp why performance may be ingrained within the Portland Psyche, we must first examine its roots.

When reviewing Oregon's true beginnings, we see that there were laws in place preventing Black individuals from crossing state lines, and any Black person would be lynched if this law was broken. These laws in the constitution would not be removed until 2001, that's only about 20 years ago (CBS News, 2021). Beneath Oregon's performative and righteous activism lies the entrenched roots of racism.

In 1844, The Oregon Black Exclusion Law was created by white colonizers in an attempt to establish an all-white territory (CBS News, 2021). Things shifted when industrialist Henry Kaiser enlisted Black workers from the South to assist in war exertions. Kaiser built a city by the name of Vanport, where about 40% of Black individuals resided. In 1948, an immense amount of the Black population living there perished by a flood, and rumors circulated around that the Portland Housing Authority was behind it in an attempt to eradicate the Black population (McElderly, 1998). In modern day this is still happening. Portland has seen gentrification, particularly in the Albina neighborhood. Prices have risen, and as result, the original Black residents have been driven out; gentrification and various racial injustices have never been attributed or ratified by Oregon (CBS News 2021).

However, outwardly, Portland is seen as overtly socially conscious, with new ideas and labels being thrown around daily. But my question for my fellow Portland residents is, do you even know what you're saying? Are you just repeating what you've heard from someone else to fit what you think society wants from you? Do you actually care about Black people's lives, or are you in it for the moment and the trend? As stated earlier, we as a society have not healed from our histories, and an aspect that perpetuates this deep-rooted racism is white silence and erasure (DiAngelo, 2016). Rejection of truth in Portland exists in the origins of its residents as well as guilt and shame; trained to be silent and invisible, as if Oregon was not built on the desire

to terminate Black existence. As indicated prior, past studies have shown that acting out of guilt encourages avoidance of the rooted issue and escapism of negative emotions associated with racially charged crimes. In addition, it is an attempt to regain a virtuous image within the white community (Kutlaca & Radke, 2023). When strolling through Portland neighborhoods and visiting the countless coffee shops, one will most likely see signs in support of *Black Lives Matter* and various other movements. It is quite evident how effortless it is to present identifications in a manner that discounts systemic inequalities (Hesford, 2021). It is important to explore aspects of why a culture is the way that it is. Oregon is fighting hard to cover up what it truly is, to such an extent that it has forgotten its past, what it fails to recognize is that the landscapes that surround us have a part in defining us (Laymon & Brackens 2020). Residue from the past haunts Oregon, and entrenched within it are aspects of performance fueled by erasure of history and white silence. In order to move forward, Oregon must remove its rose-colored glasses, and face its ghosts.

### **Consequences of Performative Allyship**

The critical issue that arises with performative allyship is that it has the potential to negatively impact disadvantaged group members and weaken the objectives within the social movement (Kutlaca & Radke, 2023). In an attempt to show support for a movement, the opposite may be occurring. For instance, according to Ore (2019) signs encompassing *Black Lives Matter* or any Black individual who has lost their life, is an exploitation of Black suffering, Black death and Black grief. She expands further and states that Black Death has and remains to be a way to demonstrate an individual's whiteness and compares it to lynching. Nevertheless, superficially, this may not be a person's intention, however there are underlying factors that need to be addressed for effective social change, and that includes looking internally instead of externally.

In addition, individuals who are engaging in performative allyship behaviors for personal gain could be affecting disadvantaged groups negatively. Studies have proven that Black individuals are better at uncovering if a white individual is performing non-prejudice behaviors for personal gain (LaCrosse et al., 2015). This could be emotionally demanding on these individuals, and cause chronic stress and impact overall well-being in the long run (Kutlaca & Radke, 2022; Kunstman & Fitzpatrick, 2018). Similarly, when men oppose sexism for elitism reasons, it has been found that women's overall well-being decreases (Kutlaca & Rudke, 2023; Estevan-Reina et al., 2021). Furthermore, it has been found that activist groups who are led by advantaged members are more unsuccessful in bringing disadvantaged members (Kutlaca & Rudke., 2023). This is due in part to advantaged members' urge to have their voices heard, rather than disadvantaged (Kutlaca & Rudke, 2023).

That being said, it may also be argued that performative allyship is imparting a positive social change within society (Kutlaca & Radke, 2023). Though it may not be deliberate, advantage group members who enlist in performative behaviors are still technically spreading the word (Kutlaca & Radke, 2023). A recent study conducted by Kutlaca et al. (2021) indicated that the higher the numbers of advantaged group members present at a protest the more public support in regards to social movements (Kutlaca et al., 2021; Kutlaca & Radke, 2023). It was also found that the inclusion of advantaged group members expanded the belief that comradeship is normative behavior (Kutlaca et al., 2021; Kutlaca & Radke, 2023). This is due in part because advantaged group members are seen as the norm. However, Kutlaca et al. (2021) cautions not to view advantaged group members as saviors, because the outcome could equate to less support from disadvantaged groups.

### **Conclusion**

Though performative allyship has been around for quite some time, it could be considered a fairly new phenomenon in academic discourse. It is still finding its bearings as a topic of study, and one of the biggest indicators of this is that there is not a specific measure created in order to examine performative allyship. Researchers have utilized Planté (1998) internal and external motivation measures. Though this may give insight into performative allyship behaviors, it would be ideal to create a specific measure designated to examining performative behaviors.

Furthermore, potential consequences of performative allyship were examined, the main consequence being that performative behaviors could negatively impact disadvantaged groups as well as their goals surrounding social equity. However, positive outcomes were also found associated with performative allyship. Those who are acting out of performance are after all still spreading the word about specific movements. Future research may look into how to leverage social conformity and examine when it is useful versus what circumstances it becomes self-serving.

Additionally, when reviewing the literature, and putting together connections, there was a common theme of an individual's identity and identity threat; the ego, or an external personification of what one thinks or believes they are. We have become acquainted with race and gender as an identity as well as various other constructs. Similarity with the signs and the labels of allyship, we have latched on to words and their meanings. Furthermore, when these self-applied labels are threatened, an individual may become emotional or enraged, because they believe their entire identity is being questioned.

It would seem that instead of looking within ourselves, we are more concerned with how others are perceiving us. Interestingly enough, like how performance is an external entity, the



ways in which we identify are also external entities. If we as society were secure within ourselves, would there be a need to prove who we are? Actor and comedian, Jim Carrey (n.d.), once said that there are two kinds of people that exist in this world, actors who are aware that they are acting, and actors who are so lost in their roles that they are unaware that they are acting. Similar to Goffman's interpretation of performance where he suggests two extremes: a performer who is so captured by their performance in comparison to a performer who is disbelieving of their performance (Goffman, 1956). There are various layers to performance allyship in general. When examining the motives behind performative allyship, it should not be lost that performance exists in all forms on various levels. After all, we are all products of our environment.

Performative allyship is the easy way out. Not only can it be harmful to disadvantaged groups, it also prevents self-reflection and learning, and essentially puts a band-aid on real issues at play. In order to move forward and improve the well-being of our society, we must first be honest with ourselves and others. Maya Angelou (n.d.) once said "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better." Looking to the future, we hope that this research will ignite further reflection and deep examination of performance allyship, and promote a dialogue between differing opinions as well as authenticity among individuals and society as a whole.

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