

Activist Zine Assignment Prompt

Written Content: In this final course assignment, I invite you to create your own Activist Zine. Your Zine should consist of at least 4 different written/print articles of at least 500-600 words. Here are the categories:

1. Personal Activism
2. Activism in Culture
3. Brand Activism
4. _____ Activism

You will notice that the first three elements mirror assignments that you've already completed. I fully expect you to revise and edit the work you've already completed so that it fits the format of your Zine. You may take direct sentences and/or paragraphs (you are *not* self-plagiarizing here). The topic of the fourth and final required article is up to you. However, I am asking you to showcase your learning and/or thinking by making this article about something you've learned in this course. For example, you might discuss one of the strategies of agitation and control rhetorics in reference to a social justice or activism issue that you care about. Or, you might think back to questions that were posed to you in your weekly posts and create an article based on your response. You have creative freedom with this fourth article, as long as it broadly addresses "Activist Rhetorics."

Visual Content: Your Zine should include at least three images. These images can be digital or hand-drawn, or selected online with author attribution from free image websites like [Pexels](#) and [Unsplash](#).

Other Content: Your Zine should also include a cover page and an original title.

Zine Format

Material: The original concept of a Zine is a hand designed DIY publication. You may absolutely choose this route (with either handwritten text or copied print text). If you are the type of individual who likes to draw, cut, paste, and create by hand, then feel free to choose this option. To submit your Zine, you should then make a photocopy of the document. You can do this via your mobile device with the [CamScanner app](#) (if you do not have a scanner in your home).

Digital: You may also create a digital Zine. I am open to you using whatever platform that you choose, as long as you are able to share the Zine with me. Here are some options for creating Zines online:

- **FlipSnack** - Zines under 15 pages are free:
<https://www.flipsnack.com/ezone>
- **FlipHTML5** - 500 pages free but does include ads and watermarks (which are fine with me for this assignment): <https://fliphtml5.com/>
- **AmyZine** - Free, but may not be the best with digital images -
<https://amyzine.com/>
- **Issuu** - Really nice platform but includes a few ads: <https://issuu.com/>

Mixed Format: Feeling creative? Feel free to mix both formats here (as long as they are presented in one Zine file).

We will talk more about the affordances and constraints of these various methods as we progress through the assignment. Although this is not a digital media course, we will visit some core concepts that you will need to know for digital media composing. I invite those of you who have completed (or are currently enrolled in) digital media courses to share your expertise, tips, and resources!

ACTIVISM

A CHANGING PERSPECTIVE



A Reluctant Path to Activism

27 September 2020

I used to think to be an activist you had to dedicate your lifestyle and all your time to traditional forms of activism. I never wanted to be a 'pioneer' or the 'token queer person' and when I took up the activist role it was with a sense of resentment—why should I have to constantly defend my right to exist as I am? The truth is that I should not have to, but it is the reality we live in. Becoming a reluctant activist changed how I understand the relationship between minority individuals, activism, and the legal system. I came to understand that the human rights laws activists fight to create mean little if people do not speak out when these laws are violated. I now believe the core of an activist's identity can just mean refusing to relinquish an individual's right to exist as they are—choosing to defend that right for yourself, others, and communities.



Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario
Application under Section 34 of the Human Rights Code (Form 1)
 (Disponible en français)
 www.hrto.ca

How to Apply to the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario

Before you start:

1. Read the questions and answers below to find out if the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario (the Tribunal) has the ability to deal with your Application.
2. Download and read the Applicant's Guide from the Tribunal's web site www.hrto.ca. If you need a paper copy or accessible format, contact us.

Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario
 625 Bay Street, 14th Floor
 Toronto, Ontario
 M5G 1S1
 Phone: 416-326-1112 TDD/Rel: 1-800-598-3227
 Fax: 416-326-2105 TDD/Rel: 1-800-555-1006
 TTY: 416-326-2022 TDD/Rel: 1-800-627-1246
 Email: HRTCO.Registr@hrto.ca
 Website: www.hrto.ca

3. Complete each section of this Application form. As you fill out each section, refer to the instructions in the Applicant's Guide.

The Tribunal has other guides and notices (directives) to help all parties to an Application understand the process. Download copies from the Tribunal's website or contact us.

Getting help with your application
 For a free legal assistance with the application, contact the Human Rights Legal Support Centre.
 Website: www.hrto.ca, Mail: 180 Dundas Street West, 8th Floor, Toronto, ON M7G 1S1, Tel: 416-597-4920
 Toll-free: 1-800-251-5151, Fax: 416-597-4501, TDD/Rel: 1-800-251-5153, TTY: 416-597-4920, Toll-free: 1-800-612-8827

Questions About Filing an Application with the Tribunal
 The following questions and answers are provided for general information. They should not be taken as legal advice or a determination of how the Tribunal will decide any particular application. For legal advice and assistance, contact the Human Rights Legal Support Centre.

Who can file an Application with the Tribunal?
 You can file an Application if you believe you experienced discrimination or harassment in one of the five areas covered by the Ontario Human Rights Code (the Code). The Code lists a number of grounds for claiming discrimination and harassment. To find out if you have grounds for your complaint under the Code, read the Applicant's Guide.

What is the time limit for filing an Application?
 You can file an Application up to one year after you experienced discrimination or harassment. If there was a series of events, you can file up to one year after the last event. In some cases, the Tribunal may extend this limit.

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It takes time and exposure to other people's daily realities recognize discrimination and understand that not everyone experiences it. Microaggressions are hard to identify because they are interconnected with your normal experience of the world. As a strange queer kid from small city in British Columbia, microaggressions were my normal. But in 2018, fighting for work in Toronto's highly competitive job market made the implications of this discrimination far more serious: either I forsake my identity to fit the framework employers were looking for or I face unemployment and welfare.

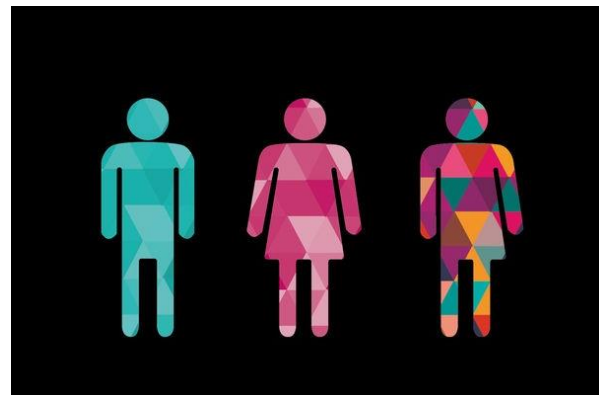
Microaggression: subtle or covert acts of discrimination that usually occur daily and promulgate a negative or offensive idea towards marginalized groups. For example, assuming a black individual to be a fast runner, or creating an information form with only two gender options.

I was offered a job by the owner of a local restaurant (for confidentiality reasons I will call it "The Smog" owned by "Chad"). Upon receiving the offer via text message, I notified Chad of my pronouns—they/them—and requested he and his staff address me accordingly. Chad's response stated that he did not understand what I meant because "they are plurals, referring to more than one person". He further claimed I was asking him to "change the dynamics of [his] team". He revoked the job offer.

Between my struggle to cope with university stress, a new city, and my failing mental health I had little remaining energy to fight another battle, but with the support of LGBTQ2S+ friends I was reluctantly convinced not to just let this discrimination go. Fed up and armed with written documentation of the whole situation, I filed a complaint through the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario.

I was tempted many times to drop the case. What kept me going through the arduous year-long process was that even though it seemed to be just a moment in the grand scheme of things, I saw its connection to a larger social issue. Standing up for myself also meant standing up for my community—while other LGBTQ2S+ individuals may not have the necessary tools or support system, I did. If the outcome was just knowing that an ignorant and discriminatory person was forced to think about me and have his actions legally scrutinized, it would have been enough.

Chad hired a lawyer who declared in their “Response to an Application under Section 34 of the *Human Rights Code* (Form 2)” that Chad was exempted from blame because I was “vague” about my identity. For not justifying my pronouns “attitude” was claimed as the reason that I did not receive the job. After a year of navigating stressful legal paperwork Chad and I reached a settlement through mediation. Although there was no ‘official’ blame, the Minutes of Settlement required



Chad to complete the “Human Rights 101” course on the Ontario Human Rights Commission website, post “Code Cards” at The Smog, and update his business policies to include specific reference to non-discrimination on the basis of gender identity.

These parts of the settlement were powerful because regardless of whether his personal opinions about gender were affected, his public ones had to change. I hope the next person will not have to choose between their personal integrity and a means to support themselves.

Through this experience I learned being an activist does not always mean having the loudest voice, it can simply mean being willing to use yours and not just accept the world as it is. Being an activist does not mean you must cease to identify with other social roles but rather you are an activist because of your interconnection to those roles.

Activism Expectations & Celebrities as Role Models

28 October 2020

In May of 2020, the Black Lives Matter movement exploded into a worldwide spotlight, incited by the murder of George Floyd at the hands of white police officers. Following this, companies, celebrities, and influencers around the world are rushing to make a declaration of ‘where they stand’ on #BlackLivesMatter. This pressure to choose is rhetorically exigent—there is a sense that change is happening so every single person must pick a side and there is no longer an option to occupy a mute middle ground. Because people look to celebrities

as role models and expect a certain level of engagement from them, activism organizations recognize the value of celebrity influence or endorsement (Rao).

The result means an immense demand for celebrities to use of the greater scope of their voices and due to pandemic-related lockdowns around the world we are seeing much of this discourse through online mass-communication platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. Based on the stages of activism described by Bowers et al., this platform activism falls between the stages of promulgation (spreading information and gathering support), solidification (creating unity and reinforcing a position) and polarization (forcing people to choose a side).

The resulting posts, videos, and discussions have varying degrees of effectiveness ranging from positive promulgation and solidification of the Black Lives Matter movement to performative words that are just that: words. Some celebrities are performing activism for the sake of reputation and public approval while others are acting altruistically. Given the division between their public profiles and private lives and the ambiguous meaning of some posts, it is hard to definitively know the difference between ‘true’ activism and ‘performative’ activism.

The following three examples are for studying the effectiveness of different approaches to platform activism by examining the rhetorical strategies used as well as the discourse surrounding celebrity activism in 2020. Something to keep in mind when analyzing these examples is the addressed audience versus the assembled audience. These are all white celebrities whose addressed audience might be expected to consist mainly of other white people who may be ignorant and/or contributing to the problem. If this is correct, their purpose could be said to be mainly to educate their peers. The assembled audience, however, is the world at large, including those whose social positions or knowledge make them understandably critical and passionate. This creates a large possibility for disconnect between the public figure and their following.

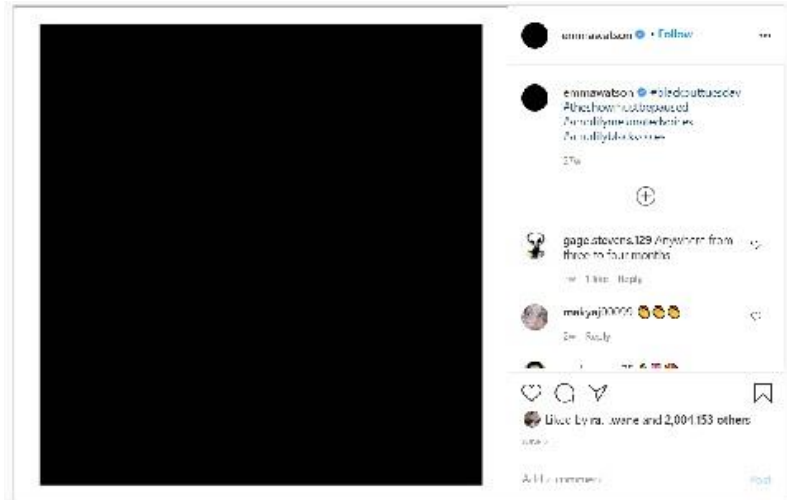
Misha Collins arranged and hosted a conversation with four Black activists, which he described as “profound and illuminating”— it was aired originally through Instagram Live then later posted to YouTube (Collins). In his opening remarks he appealed to a pathos of urgency and anxiety by using the term “crisis point” to describe the problem of racism in America. The conversation centered around promulgating awareness of what was happening between protests, riots, and violence (by both sides) and most importantly *why* it was happening.

Collins approached the conversation with an ethos that reads as humble, and he showed both an awareness of his privilege and an eagerness to learn and change. Instead of preaching an opinion of his own



(as a white American) he encouraged responses from a panel of experts, lending the conversation a credibility that his voice alone cannot provide. Collins' amplification of expert Black voices combined with his own humility gives a leading example of how a white person can aid the Black Lives Matter movement by not only demonstrating a willingness to create meaningful change within themselves but also by encouraging the same from the larger world.

For #BlackoutTuesday Emma Watson participated through Instagram by posting black squares (Watson). However, the three black squares Watson posted showed a subtle but significant edit: they had white borders to match her Instagram aesthetic. Whether this was careless or careful does not really matter because the resulting message is the same—Watson was thinking of her own image while performing virtual activism. Watson does declare the side she is on, perhaps responding to the pressure to polarize, but the declaration

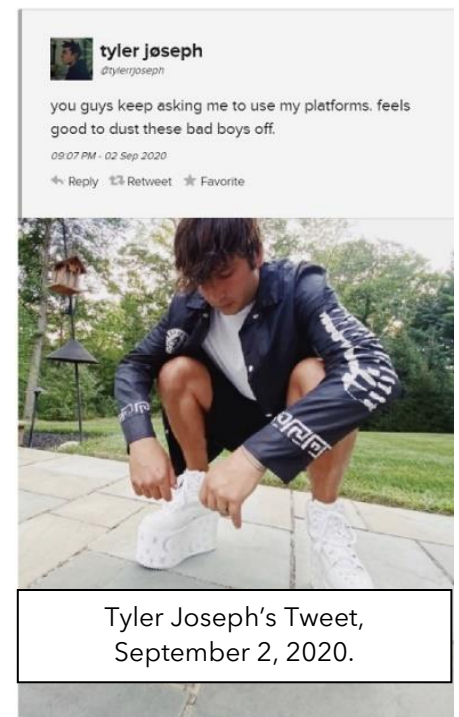


Emma Watson's post in support of #BlackOutTuesday, posted June 2, 2020.

can be read as empty. Whatever her intended message, it falls flat for two reasons: her ethos is weak and self-centred, and her voice is lost under much more thoughtful ones.

Finally, we have a Tweet from Tyler Joseph, creator and frontman of Twenty One Pilots, a band known for their focus on suicide and mental health awareness but not activism per se. His post is jarring and inappropriate given the context, because his ethos reads as humour at a time when the Black Lives Matter movement is facing a severely escalating crisis. Joseph's post can be interpreted in several ways: maybe he misread the situation and inadvertently offended people; maybe he purposely commented on an expectation he felt was inappropriate; or maybe he does not support Black Lives Matter. Joseph seemed to be relying on his established logos as a conscientious advocate for mental illness awareness because the humour with which he addressed his audience indicates his assumption that they must know where he stands on the Black Lives Matter movement.

Joseph's specific choice of words is very important because he indicated that he keeps being asked to do something—and that thing is not *that* he is expected to choose a



Tyler Joseph's Tweet, September 2, 2020.

Author: @twinkl2020

side, but *how* he is expected to demonstrate his choice and the specific actions he is expected to take. Although inappropriate, his post is particularly interesting because it begs the question of what is appropriate to expect of celebrities and public figures in regards to *how* more than *if* they support a particular cause.

From these examples, Misha Collins supports the Black Lives Matter movement in a way that is beneficial to the movement, partly due to his established ethos that is both humble and genuine. The video is a helpful use of his privileged position in society because it amplifies the voices of activists and aids in the agitation strategies of gathering support through promulgation and solidification. In the chosen example, Watson is a performative activist. Considering she was appointed UN Women Goodwill Ambassador in 2014, it is important to now make a distinction between online platform activism and real-life activism. As with all facets of celebrity life, we as an audience only know about them what is made public, and the judgement that follows is only based on information available. So when a celebrity is publicly an activist (Emma Watson) or speaks passionately for a cause (Tyler Joseph), we have no way of knowing if or how those activist actions may or may not extend to other causes.

But we expect them to. The assembled audience of the world at large and of a public figure's specific following expect the individual to contribute *meaningfully* and *publicly* to a movement, particularly when that movement reaches a global scale. Although expecting the people we admire to be good role models is very fair, perhaps telling them how to do so is more complex. While there are obvious ways to *not* be an activist, there are many ways to support a cause both publicly and privately.

-UPDATE from December 2020-

Joseph apologized on video December 3, 2020 before he participated in a livestream event for charity. In the video he recognizes how and why he hurt people, and admits he was in the wrong. He comments on an outreach program he created to help inner city kids in Ohio and concludes by saying, "I am a supporter of Black lives in ways you may never know". This further confirms the argument that we really have no way of knowing how a public figure's activism may extend to real life until we are told.



<https://twitter.com/i/status/1336503892713082>

Corporate Social Responsibility

CASE STUDY

Rocky Mountain Soap Co.



Introduction

In this case study, we are examining the Corporate Social Responsibility efforts of Rocky Mountain Soap Co. a natural soap company based in Canmore, Alberta. Rocky shows good initiatives and values in its current social responsibility plan, but to survive and flourish their future must take into consideration a scope that is wider in range than just creating sustainable and healthy products.

What is Rocky Already Doing Well?



Rocky's "Natural Standard" is a commitment to safe and natural products made from simple and local ingredients. Rocky claims they use limited processing, cause no environmental harm, and never test on animals. Rocky has several environmental initiatives, including sustainability with a "zero waste" goal, which they are working towards by incorporating biodegradable or recyclable packaging. The base in Canmore is an environmentally conscious workshop and lab made largely from recycled materials.

Rocky also does a lot of information sharing, through "the toxin-free movement" (where they host events and do giveaways to email subscribers), an active blog (posts about how their products are made, specific ingredients, or community events) and their Red and Green lists (simplified lists showing harmful and unarmful products). These CSR efforts are well-displayed on Rocky's website making them transparent and easy to access.

Areas for Improvement

Rocky severely lacks race and gender diversity. Of all the photos of staff or customers on their website and every employee listed on LinkedIn, 90% of them are white women. That leaves only 10% of anyone Rocky has associated with their brand who are people of colour, visible minorities, or men. For the products there is only a handful in the “men’s line”, which is a subsection fairly hidden on the website. The message Rocky is sending says: our products are made exclusively by and for white women.

Rocky makes efforts towards sustainability but the scope is limited to the company’s immediate needs. Outside of sourcing ingredients or product creation there are only two small community initiatives. One is a short video from a visit to a conservation area (with an unclear purpose), and the other is a post made on Instagram in support of #BlackOutTuesday. The post announces support for Black lives and states that Rocky donated \$1000 to an organization called Colour the Trails that conducts outdoor activities for Black, Indigenous, people of colour and LGBTQ individuals to help fight the stereotype that those people are not active outdoors.

This initiative was disappointing because the donation was only one time and there is no mention of it on Rocky’s website. Positive social actions done in silence have so much less potential for positive results.

Three Approaches to Improvement: Visual, Textual and Action

VISUAL Visible diversity means showing support for people of all colours and all genders. On the Instagram post mentioned that is in support of Black Lives Matter, users commented with wishes to see more of this type of content. Rocky’s response was that although they want to do more, in Canada visible minorities are a very small percentage of people (it’s about 8%). They say that lack of diversity in population means creating diversity in their workforce is hard. *This is an excuse.* Diversity being “hard” to create just means that effort must be applied in creative ways.

For example, in Canada about 20% of people are visible minorities and in Toronto—where Rocky has about one quarter of their stores—30% of people are visible minorities. Diversity may be a challenge, but it is not a barrier. There are ways to support people of colour not only through employment, but through creating a relevant brand. To create a message of inclusivity, Rocky should be selective and purposeful with their imagery, both on social media and their website.

TEXTUAL Rocky should show their support textually and that can help if it takes some time to incorporate race-and-gender diverse people into the workforce and imagery. They can start by updating

content on the website's homepage, for example, to say Rocky makes "safe and natural products *for all different skin types and colours*". They can create messages of education or solidarity for current or annual social issues (such as Black History month or Pride month) and post them frequently on their social media channels and website.

Rocky should eliminate *all* gender specific labelling for *all* products. They should take what they said on Instagram about the desire for more racial diversity and speak transparently about the challenges they encounter as they work to solve that problem. It is important to remember it is more valuable to show you are trying, than to fight to appear perfect but struggle in private. Being transparent would show Rocky to be trustworthy and accountable.

ACTION Actions take more time and steps to implement, requiring careful planning and procedural progress, however the potential results are more meaningful and worthwhile.

First, Rocky should begin a hiring campaign that actively seeks the talents and creative contributions of people of colour and LGBTQ2S+ individuals. If Rocky does the groundwork first to create an openly supportive and inclusive brand they will be more appealing and comfortable for everyone to work for. Second is product creation. Rocky should begin with getting rid of labels geared towards men—but do not get rid of those *products*. Make more. Rocky should make more products for specific *needs*, without having to label specific *people*. For example, make beard oil and shaving cream for people who have beards and need to shave. Make creams that cater to tough, dry, thin or oily skin for people who have those skin types. Create shampoo for people with kinky or curly hair as well as straight hair.

The bottom line is that labelling any product for certain people based on sex, gender, and race stereotypes will limit sales and the quality of Rocky's customer experience. By writing labels specifying who can use a product, they are literally sending a message that excludes everyone else.

Why, and Why Now?

We have used Rocky as an example, but they are not unique in the areas they need to improve upon. Small companies offering handmade and sustainable products is a great start, but those elements are quickly becoming basic necessities. People are asking companies to do more. To survive and thrive, companies need to think to the future to not get lost in the crowd. They should get ahead of the curve by being a leading and practicing example of social justice and race and gender equality. The companies that do this will be the ones people still shop with ten years from now.

In Rocky's mission statement, they say that the industry standard is not good enough, and that safe beauty care products are for everyone. Not everyone is represented at Rocky so the message falls flat; it's just words. Rocky needs to live by that mission statement or risk losing credibility and customer loyalty.

A Final Word

Our social climate is changing. Recent events are making that impossible to deny or ignore. As shown through comments and conversations on social media people are directly *asking* for more representation. Soon they will be demanding it. Now is not the time to dwell on excuses, but to overcome challenges in transparent and honest ways. Living in a white zone is not an excuse to be a white zone. People care more and more about a brand's initiatives beyond the scope of their products, so it is time for companies like Rocky to step up to the challenge.



Microactivism: The Connecting Thread

11 December 2020

While studying for and writing the prior three articles in this Zine, my primary focus has been on public or traditional activism; activism on a macro-scale. While undoubtedly important for making large strides for equality and human rights the activism we tend to study most skims over humble but crucial beginnings. I believe a truly effective activism strategy begins with the smaller acts associated with microactivism.

In the past year people have been variously affected by the pandemic. People who have been home with less to occupy their time may also face greater risk participating in traditional public activism. Right now when many social issues are reaching a fever pitch or getting more publicity there is lots of pressure to act. A lot of people want to help but are not sure how or feel that going out into the world is unsafe. This is the perfect opportunity to focus on microactivism.

Microactivism is the direct opposite or response to microaggressions and can include things like calling out a friend or family member when they make a sexist or racist joke or use a common stereotype. I

believe that choosing to be conscientious and aware of what you are saying, doing, or assuming every day makes a huge difference to whether your public activist efforts read as performative or altruistic.

Microactivism begins with being honest with yourself about areas in which your thinking may need improvement. A friend often comes to me troubled when they notice themselves thinking sexist or racist thoughts. They ask me what that says about them as a person, concerned these thoughts make them fundamentally sexist or racist. I think a person's first thought reflects what they were conditioned to think by the society and family that raised them. Their second thought represents their learning or growth and conscious choices they have made about who they want to be. Finally, their actions represent a solidification of who they are in the world, be it in their public or private life. You are not defined by your thoughts—what truly counts is how you choose to act.

Denying racist or sexist thoughts only adds to the problem because you are not actively addressing it. Acknowledging that you are and/or have been wrong, and actively trying to become better is impactful to those around you and more likely to make a positive difference because you are taking ownership of your mistakes and willing to grow from them. Misha Collins has acknowledged not fully understanding his privilege and feeling ashamed while wanting to learn to do better.

About three months after his original post, Tyler Joseph apologised and admitted he was wrong in his prior Tweet. Joseph's ethos was raw and honest and he talked about a non-profit organization he started years ago to help inner-city kids in Ohio. He comments that he did not want public attention for it because that "was never the point" and that he is "a supporter of Black lives in ways you may never know" (James) while still acknowledging that he was at fault for his earlier actions.

I noticed the common thread with the brands and public figures I studied: performative activism can feel empty and produce negative backlash when the brand or person is not read as genuine or living up to their words. Celebrities like Emma Watson who are publicly known as activists can still seem performative. Had she given more thought to the micro-scale nuances of her post maybe it would feel genuine. Brands like Rocky Mountain Soap Co. receive criticism when their public narrative and mission statement do not line up with their company's actions. I do not always say something when I notice micro- or macro-aggressions—my younger self used derogatory "that's so gay" language, and hid parts of myself that I was told were not "gay enough" because I was afraid I would lose legitimacy or face further judgement. But each time we remain silent or speak without careful thought, the problem grows.

I believe that a true activist does not only comment and act publicly but makes it part of their private daily lives. Beginning with careful focus on thoughts that lead to perpetuation of stereotypes and inequality can make a big difference both at a base level of activism and with the effectiveness of public activism.

**You are not defined by your thoughts—
what truly counts is how you choose to act.**

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