

“It’s All for Show”: Performative Allyship as Saying One Thing but Doing Nothing by Leaders

Abstract

The current research advances a novel and increasingly common form of allyship that can lend itself to moral hypocrisy and has important consequences for employees and organizations. I break new ground by proposing *performative allyship*, in which organizational leaders publicly tout their solidarity with equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) issues but withhold actual support (i.e., “saying one thing but doing nothing”). Nine (plus one supplemental) preregistered studies using recall in the field, scenarios, behavioral games, and qualitative questions reveal that populations facing disadvantages from race, gender, sexual orientation, or indigenous status evaluate leaders who exhibit performative allyship as hypocritical, self-serving, and image-managing about their moral virtues. Specifically, performative allies can be judged virtually as negatively as those who disregard allyship and consistently show no ally actions. The negative evaluations of performative allies lead to moral outrage and higher minority turnover. On a positive side, attributing performative allyship as hypocrisy ignites moral outrage, and therefore simultaneously motivates minority employees to advocate for social change, representing a silver lining to this dark side allyship phenomenon. By integrating the four-stage moral judgment and decision making model and deonance theory, this research contributes to allyship theory and literature from a morality and justice lens, with profound practical implications for organizational diversity practice.