

CRINGEY WHITE PEOPLE AND THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Description
BLM	Black Lives Matter

ABSTRACT

During the early 2000s, social media became a popular digital platform where individuals could share their information with people they may not know. Over time, Instagram became more than just a social app. Political and economic purposes found their way onto Instagram, where news media stations such as CNN, FOX, and others post news images or videos. In response to racial tensions in 2020 from George Floyd's death from police brutality. Many White, Hispanic, or Black users have submitted different posts or videos showing support for the Black Lives Matter Movement, including various hashtags. My study examines 243 posts from 41 users over the course of a year for evidence on how posts may be cringey, performative activism, or slacktivism.

I. INTRODUCTION

During the early 2000s, social media became a popular digital platform where individuals could share their information with people they may not know. From 2004 to the current day, several popular social media platforms were created, including Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, Instagram, and Snapchat. When Instagram was first created in 2010, users could create customized profiles and post images that other users could like or comment on (Tafesse and Wood 2021). In 2012 Facebook bought Instagram and added new features, including the capability to create and post videos, images, or stories (Tafesse and Wood 2021). Instagram contains features that empower users to create networks and connect with friends or strangers. Users cannot only edit images such as tagging other users and applying filters, but they can also message and share stories (Moreau 2018). Users rely on the platform for a variety of functions, including sharing images of their own daily lives and adventures, advertising and marketing products, and taking part in various shared activities through the use of hashtags (Giannoulakis & Tsapatsoulis, 2016).

Over time, Instagram became more than just a social app. Political and economic purposes found their way onto Instagram, where news media stations such as CNN, FOX, and others post news images or videos. This now serves as one means as to how the younger generation gets their news (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, and Matassi 2017). In response to racial tensions in 2020 from George Floyd's death from police brutality, many White, Hispanic, or Black users have submitted different posts or videos showing support for the Black Lives Matter Movement, including various hashtags. However, at times posts by white users may create a "cringey" sensation where the viewer perceives a

post as ignorant, awkward, or in violations of norms regarding racial discourse (Müller-Pinzler et al. 2016).

In June of 2020, users on social media posted a blank photo showing nothing, just a black screen, and attached the hashtag #BlackOutTuesday as a collective action in response to police brutality and racism. The posts, including this famous black screen photo and hashtags #BlackOutTuesday and #BlackLivesMatter are an example of performative activism, the use of performance as a method of protesting for social justice (Shefer 2019). This is in contrast to what is termed “slacktivism,” the low or minimal effort an individual performs to bring awareness (Lee and Hsieh 2013). The distinction between performative activism and slacktivism is the impact on social change; slacktivists may perform one action and be done, whereas a performative activist will continue such action for a movement. If White people consider themselves activists towards the BLM movement, the label of performative activism should empower them to contribute and rally others to help (Leong et al. 2019).

The research questions for this study include: Are white users engaging in slacktivism or are they engaging in performative activism? Are white users making cringey posts regarding the Black Lives Matter Movement? What is the relationship between cringeyness and slacktivism? I contend that the cringeyness of posts by white people regarding the BLM goes hand in hand with slacktivism, indicating an insincere attempt to capitalizing on the social media trending of BLM.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Black Lives Matter Movement

The Black Lives Matter movement's current-day situation follows a similar pathway to the Civil Rights Movement. At that time, in the 1960s, each time an African American was killed by police brutality, protesters would wave banners or project images of Emmett Till (Frank 2020). Both Emmett Till's death in 1955 (Fernández 2020) and George Floyd's death in 2020 served as significant catalysts to a movement (Civil Rights and Black Lives Matter) that already existed but gained more attention after those violent deaths. Fernández (2020:57) argues that Emmet Till was the "big bang" to the Civil Rights Movement, where George Floyd can be seen as the 'big bang' to the Black Lives Matter Movement.

Three California activists, all African-American women, created the Black Lives Matter Movement in July, 2013: Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi, and Alicia Garza. They were inspired by the acquittal of George Zimmerman on July 13, 2013; Zimmerman was found not guilty of murdering black teenager Trayvon Martin, who was shot and killed by Zimmerman as Martin was walking home from a convenience store near his apartment (Garza 2018; Carney 2016). The stated reason for the creation of the movement was to combat the "anti-Black racism" (Garza 2018:23) that still lives today. The movement in 2013 sparked the creation of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter, which aimed to spread and gain awareness until "Black lives are no longer systematically and intentionally targeted for demise" (Carney 2016:181).

The Black Lives Matter Movement had a resurgence after the death of Michael Brown at the hands of officer Darren Wilson (Carney 2016; Edwards and Harris 2015).

Wilson had seen Brown walking in the street, and the confrontation quickly turned into Brown being shot multiple times (Carney 2016). Like Trayvon Martin's, Brown's death created the slogan and hashtag 'hands up, don't shoot' (Smit, Heinrich, and Broersma 2017) among social media and protests across the nation. Because of Brown's death and the hashtag 'hands up, don't shoot,' this single protest event, Justice for Michael Brown (JfMB), was created on Facebook. The 'Justice for Michael Brown' event continued to increase the overall support for Black lives being lost to racism and police brutality.

Mundt, Ross, and Burnett (2018) conducted a study where he argued the BLM movement and digital platforms could strengthen and expand globally towards Black Liberation. The use of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter (Garza 2018) on digital media has spread towards the mainstream media. Individuals are now able to create narratives or stories and pass them worldwide (Mundt et al. 2018); this could inspire people worldwide.

Social Media and Hashtags

Social media, which has existed since 1997, encourages users to create and personalize their profile or 'identity' (Kietzmann et al. 2011) and communicate with friends (Kietzmann et al. 2011; Dijck 2013; Safko 2010; Kirkpatrick, Brown, and McDaniel 2008). Six Degrees was the first platform that was designed to allow users to customize their profiles while adding friends; however, by the year 2000, Six Degrees ended up shutting down (Kietzmann et al. 2011). In 2003, Myspace was created, which was a platform very much like Six Degrees; however, Myspace users were given more choices such as the ability to decide who can and cannot see their profile, get status updates on friends, and share photos, games, music (Kirkpatrick et al. 2008). Not long

after the creation of Myspace, Facebook took the spotlight with features similar to Six Degrees (Kietzmann et al. 2011) based on having a customizable profile where photos and comments can be shared with friends (Safko 2010). Facebook users were also able to create a more family-oriented network to promote themselves or products while learning from communities or organizations that are close to the user (Safko 2010).

After the launch of Facebook, Twitter made its appearance where users could create customized profiles and network themselves; however, Twitter was more successful globally. Unlike other social media platforms, Twitter is the “first micro-blogging platform” (Safko 2010:260; Kietzmann et al. 2011). Kietzmann et al. (2011) describe these ‘micro-blogging messages as tweets’ which is Twitter’s distinct attribute to online culture (Dijck 2013). The tweets are “mostly short status updates of what users are doing, where they are, how they are feeling, or links to other sites” (Kietzmann et al. 2011:242). By the year 2010, Instagram was created and adopted similar features to previous social media platforms, where users can create customized profiles while creating networks with friends by posting photos and tagging friends via a ‘hashtag’ (Tafesse and Wood 2021; Buarki and Alkhateeb 2017).

Facebook later purchased Instagram, and thus, it’s become a combination of both Facebook and Twitter based on their features (Tafesse and Wood 2021). Instagram, however, is inherently more oriented around photos than other social media platforms. Given the feature of tagging content with a hashtag, Instagram users, like Twitter users, can feel empowered to contribute to a worldwide perspective where anyone can find a post by a particular hashtag used.

Several studies found that hashtags on Instagram play a significant role in how users send and retrieve specific posts. Research has shown that this creates a more efficient way people can navigate different categories (Buarki and Alkhateeb 2017; Giannoulakis and Tsapatsoulis 2016; Erz, Marder, and Osadchaya 2018). Creating a hashtag on social media uses the symbol “#” followed by one word or multiple words (Buarki and Alkhateeb 2017). These words used represent meanings of involvement in movements or expressing emotion such as opinions or attitudes based on the user (Ichau, Frissen, and d’Haenens 2019; Giannoulakis and Tsapatsoulis 2016; Buarki and Alkhateeb 2017). Giannoulakis and Tsapatsoulis (2016) suggest that both the post and hashtag express emotion; however, the content of text and images in a post may not directly relate to the hashtag.

The intent of using hashtags on Instagram varies on the individuals that are trying to send a message. To understand this, Ichau et al. (2019) conducted a qualitative content analysis of 1,500 posts that included hashtags representing Jewish individuals and their cultural backgrounds. Ichau et al. (2019:7-8) found that from the 1,500 posts, four content communities were present based on the hashtag use of Jews: 1) people and private lives; 2) culture and history; 3) cultural production, and 4) politics and ideology. Given these four communities using #Jewish or #Jews, users primarily focused on people, private lives, and cultural production (Ichau et al. 2019). Since users can find information on social media by typing in the hashtag keyword (Buarki and Alkhateeb 2017), these posts would be expected. However, when searching #Jewish or #Jews, users may also come across inappropriate or anti-Semitic posts (Ichau et al. 2019). Because of

this, users who search for a particular post or hashtag will often find content that may be objectionable.

Although hashtags on Instagram can vary by individuals, the widespread use of such hashtags can create a social identity or movement (Ichau et al. 2019; Giannoulakis and Tsapatsoulis 2016). Ichau et al. (2019) found that when analyzing the posts concerning #Jewish, users connected to one another that used the same hashtag; thus, widespread attention started to formulate on Instagram. From the hashtag keyword, Jewish, Ichau et al. (2019) notes that activists were among the clusters of posts submitted on Instagram. Given this perspective, activists can create a motivational game (Cotter 2018; Erz et al. 2018) where hashtags can coordinate a post to be trending or easily found by a user. Erz et al. (2018) state that with hashtags being an essential feature of Instagram, activists and social movements should flourish and gain support. However, Ichau et al. (2019) also found that when a specific hashtag is used, some users will post content that has little to no relevance to the subject. Thus, users will come across these photos and wonder what the significance is with the hashtag used. The relevance of the posts is one factor that determines if a post constitutes performative activism or slacktivism.

Online Activism, Performative Activism, and Slacktivism

Numerous researchers contend that meaningful activism can occur online as a “power struggle and resistance” towards social or political groups (Vegh 2003:71; Ghobadi and Clegg 2015; Lewis, Gray, and Meierhenrich 2014). Through social media, people can unite with others and engage in activism (Ghobadi and Clegg 2015; Newsom and Lengel 2012; Lewis et al. 2014). Newsom and Lengel (2012) conducted a study that

focused on online activism regarding Arab feminist activism in Tunisia and Egypt. The researchers found that the women in Tunisia and Egypt had access to Facebook and were empowered to take action on the issue of gender due to their ability to view other such movements elsewhere in the world.

Performative activism is the performance that is “directed at resistance to social inequality and towards social justice” (Shefer 2019:422). Shefer (2019) examined performative activism in the LGBTIQ+ movement in South Africa, where students advocated and spread awareness over the issue of sexual identity. Individuals who engaged in this activism advocated in different methods by joining protests or by taking the activism to social media, where they still fought for social equality.

In contrast to performative activism, researchers define slacktivism as a low-risk, low-activity, minimal effort on social media, which serves as a ‘feel good factor’ for the participant (Christensen 2011; Rotman et al. 2011; Lee and Hsieh 2013; Skoric 2012; Wood 2018; Glenn 2015). These individuals may be trying to perform a good deed to ease their conscience (Lee and Hsieh 2013), while engaging in virtual activism where their actions may, at best, “Affect society on a small personal scale” (Christensen 2011:4). Lee and Hsieh (2013) explain that people who engage in slacktivism can undermine activism by means of moral balancing, a lack of topic congruency, and a lack of consistency and commitment. Moral balancing is the idea that an individual will respond to a current opportunity because of a past behavior such as guilt or pride. An example of moral balancing is where a person may post a photo and reflect to cover up a negatively-viewed action in their past. Similarly, topic congruency is the idea a person may change their attitudes based on what they view (Lee and Hsieh 2013). Consistency

and commitment are aligned with cognitive dissonance theory, where a person will change their behaviors, beliefs, or attitudes to avoid feelings of discomfort. From these minimal activism efforts, these people are likely hurting activists who put much effort into specific causes. Skoric (2012) also argues that people may engage in cause-marketing with slacktivism (Selleck 2010), where a for-profit business teams up with a non-profit organization to sell merchandise to that related cause for the purpose of making money.

Slacktivism may also engage in “virtue signaling.” Levy (2020:2) defines virtue signaling as an attempt for a person to “claim they are concerned or outraged” to show how much more motivated and knowledgeable of such issue they are compared to another person. The virtue signaler will claim he or she is correcting others due to injustice; however, the signaler is more infatuated in showing that they are more well-informed than others (Levy 2020). Levy (2020:3) also argues that those who are virtue signalers tend to negatively impact the public and engage in ‘moral cynicism,’ where people are “not sincere in claiming to call attention to injustice.” For example, virtue signalers on Facebook seek to inform others how to act but are more centered on being visibly recognized; therefore, the virtue signaler can update their profile and feel good about themselves (Wallace, Buil, and Chernatony 2018).

Norm Violations and “Cringe”

Researchers define “cringe” where a person is reacting negatively to a given occurrence that happens online or in physical reality, which results in embarrassment to the viewer (Havas and Sulimma 2020; Mason 2016; Gomez-Meija 2020; Müller-Pinzler et al. 2016; Van Kleef et al. 2011). These may include actions such as public flaws,

blunders, or norm violations viewed by friends or strangers that may create a negative expression amongst them (Müller-Pinzler et al. 2016). An example of cringe by norm violations would be a person checking-out in a store with their groceries and not having the money to pay (Müller-Pinzler et al. 2016). This action may create a feeling of cringe where that if a friend or stranger were present (Müller-Pinzler et al. 2016), these individuals would know to have money with them before getting groceries.

Much of the research examining cringe examines digital advertising, where many people may spend their time watching and browsing. Gomez-Meija (2020) looks at cringe in ads and social media such as Twitter. He argues that French spectators of digital ads expressed cringe in tweets that contain the phrase “so cringe” (Gomez-Meija 2020:317) followed by an emoji that is a small facial image to express some emotion. The emoji, according to Gomez-Meija (2020), portrays more of a negative emotion like disgust as a result of a person witnessing a norm violation, blunder, or public flaw (Müller-Pinzler et al. 2016). He also argues that cringe can promote attention based on how ads are used on different platforms. Some digital ads that involve cringe are parodies where the actions are intentionally done so that the people watching will react and tweet. The cringey video would then circulate on Twitter by people talking about what they saw, this serving as a marketing stunt to boost sales. An example is a video of supermarket employees performing theatrical actions (Disney movie performances) in front of the customers, creating uncomfortable reactions since the performances can be seen as cringe.

Gap in the Literature

While there is literature addressing cringeyness on social media, there is a lack of scholarship that looks at the relationship of cringeyness to activism on social media.

While there is past literature that looks at cringe, slacktivism, and performative activism individually, they are not examined together and not in relation to social media like Instagram. This project will explicitly examine the potential links between cringey social media posts, slacktivism, and performative activism by Instagram users.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Face Theory and Expressive Behavior

Face theory examines “why and how people construct their public images and the strategies people use to maintain or restore their own or others’ images if those images are lost or threatened” (Metts and Cupach 2008:203-204). Constructing or maintaining these images may require specific equipment such as the setting, attire, or specific bodily actions (Metts and Cupach 2008). Souza et al. (2015:222) examine how selfies show a “subjective self-image” on the social media platform Instagram. They noted that female users were more likely to take selfies from different angles and emotions while modifying the image with filters. Metts and Cupach (2008) suggest that users who perform and modify their facial images with filters (Souza et al. 2015), the audience viewing the image, will then apply filters to their facial images.

With social media, people interact with expressive images like the selfie (Souza et al. 2015) to capture another’s attention based on the concept of nonverbal communication (Friedman et al. 1980). Friedman et al. (1980) discuss the concept that verbal individuals tend to “somehow use non-verbal cues to move, lead, inspire, or captivate others” (Friedman et al. 1980:333). People that are verbally expressive want to show they have ‘charisma’ and be seen as ‘spirited’ (Friedman et al. 1980). However, non-verbal cues involve a physical movement without speaking, as if on a stage, performing (Metts and Cupach 2008). These individuals will express themselves by using various equipment (Metts and Cupach 2008), which will create more of an impression towards those viewing them (Riggio and Friedman 1986). The use of facial gestures (Metts and Cupach 2008) and public settings (Riggio and Friedman 1986) will enhance the interacting user’s

expressive behavior that the performer means well without vocally speaking.

Furthermore, Crossley (1995) looks more into 'body techniques' that an individual may enact in public. The way people act out specific body movements is acquired through being trained or educated (Crossley 1995). Such individuals, whether man or woman, would also learn these bodily techniques by using their perception and mimic the action which can be seen when a person sees or hears something new and tries to reproduce it (Crossley 1995).

IV. METHODS

To examine the relationship between cringeiness, performative activism, and slacktivism, I decided to examine Instagram posts where my unit of analysis was each post by a white user. Instagram was chosen for this study since this platform allowed users to post photos or videos and to attach a description and hashtags to these posts that can be seen by others. This study's timeline ranged from George Floyd's death on May 25, 2020, to June 21, 2020 (Civiqs 2021). I selected this time frame because this represents a period of peak discourse regarding BLM after the death of George Floyd. After June 21, 2020 (Civiqs 2021), the Black Lives Matter Movement's support starts to decline on Instagram even though more people are becoming aware nationwide.

Before June 29, 2020, any person or third-party application could access Instagram's data directly. This meant that users (researchers or content creators) and third-party applications (businesses or companies) could search for and collect information on posts, users, hashtags, etc., and manipulate that information (such as sampling within the data). However, Instagram disabled access to this "Legacy API" in June, 2020, meaning that the only way to access Instagram posts now is through the website itself. I initially searched for posts under #BlackLivesMatter (lowercase letters did not change the results), which returned approximately 27.1 million posts. However, when searching a hashtag under the 'Tags' section from Instagram's search bar, the results appear in reverse chronological order, where newer posts are portrayed first while the older posts are on the bottom. If the search contains several hundred or thousand posts, the only way to see all the returned posts is to scroll down. Due to the fact that Instagram posts present were in reverse chronological order, it was impractical to

manually scroll down and sample within over a year's worth of posts covering my timeline.

Because of this dilemma, I looked at several hundred posts that used #blacklivesmatter, and from that, I identified a series of three commonly used hashtags with at most 800 thousand posts. The three top hashtags were #justiceforgeorge with 78.4 thousand posts, #georgefloyd (hands praying emoji) with 52 thousand posts, and #blacklivesmatter (three fists emoji) with 800 thousand posts. These hashtags were used closely with #blacklivesmatter; this enabled me to create a more manageable population of posts to analyze. When looking closely at the posts on the commonly used hashtags, if a post did not contain #blacklivesmatter, I would move on to another post. When I found a post that contained #blacklivesmatter from the three commonly used hashtags, I checked to see if the user was white. If the user was white, I then looked at all the posts that fit the timeline and analyzed the posts that contained #blacklivesmatter. Some of the posts analyzed had #blacklivesmatter with the three commonly used hashtags, while other posts had either other different hashtags along with #blacklivesmatter or only had #blacklivesmatter. To determine if a user was white, I would check their profile picture; if they were not white, I would move on to another user and repeat the process. While collecting the users, I assigned a pseudonym to each.

After collecting the posts and information about their users, I ended up with 41 white users that had 243 photos in the time frame. Of these 41 users, 13 were male, and 28 were female, where 4 of the 28 females were involved with a group or self-owned business (Table 1). There were 45 users originally, but I removed 3 due to these users being fan-based accounts. These users created an account and impersonated real

celebrities as if they were posting the content. This was a problem because the user’s race was non-determinable since the profile image was of the celebrity. The last user removed had their account public but later became private, which denied me access to analyze their posts. The number of posts per user ranged from 1 to 47.

Table 1. Descriptive Characteristics among White Instagram Users

Demographic	# of Accounts	# of Posts	Average # of Hashtags
Total	41 Total accounts	243	13.97
Male	13 accounts or 31.71%	100	11.45
Female	28 accounts or 68.29% 4 accounts are groups/businesses or 14.29%	143	15.73

After identifying the relevant posts, I then coded for cringeyness, slacktivism, and performative activism. For the purposes of this study, I defined cringe as a norm violation (Müller-Pinzler et al. 2016), where the poster violates the norms of social media discourse regarding activism towards racial justice. To determine the level of how a post may be cringey, I looked at past literature and put together eight codes that could be qualitatively analyzed from the Instagram posts. The first code focused on overly exceptional enthusiasm for those participating in the movement. This included users who quickly decided to speak or take some type of action with BLM without taking a step back and listen to the issue. Frankenberg (1993) suggests that white users who

figuratively picked up the ‘megaphone’ (Thurber, Fenelon, and Roberts 2015)¹, may constitute white dominance since they are accustomed to this action. The second code was the inappropriate use of props, including clothing that people were wearing, signs being held, and children forced into a photo, such as a baby. For example, in some cases, young children were present and holding signs, wearing clothing, or speaking in words representing the BLM movement, but were coached by adults; in these cases, this represented a cringe action since the kids are not able to be fully informed about the issue or the immediate environment in which they’re appearing (Maldonado, Swadener, and Khaleesi 2019).

The third code focused on the excessive emphasis on the wording in the posts, such as capitalized words, certain words in bold, or repeated words. If a caption or phrase was entirely capitalized, this was interpreted as “yelling/shouting/screaming in all caps,” indicating high speech volume from such users (Heath 2021:3). These actions are violations of “netiquette” (Scheuermann and Taylor 1997)². This means that using words or phrases that are all capitalized, such as “NO,” does not follow the general internet communication etiquette (Chandrasekharan et al. 2018). Code four involved photos taken in inappropriate or incongruous physical circumstances based on the user and the surroundings. For example, imagine a post of a man in an elevator flexing his muscles

¹ The ‘megaphone,’ according to Thurber et al. (2015:3), refers to a literal and metaphorical function where an individual may amplify their voice to broadcast their words to those who cannot hear. White antiracist activists tend to pick up the megaphone to “enact the cultural values and goals of the BLM movement (Thurber et al. 2015:3).” This action signifies white supremacy where white activists are accustomed to white dominance (Frankenberg 1993).

² Scheuermann and Taylor (1997) derive “netiquette” from the word’s “network” and “etiquette.” There are specific rules and ethics people should know when communicating online. For instance, Rinaldi (1996) presents ten commandments of computer ethics, rules that users should know and beware of if communicating online.

while using the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. In that case, this will show that the physical context of the post does not relate to the movement. Code five looked at the inappropriate or incongruous facial expressions performed. Examples of this code include users who smiled, frowned, or looked serious. Hall, Coats, and Le Beau (2005:907) suggest that “people associate power with less smiling, more gazing, more other-touching, more gesturing, more interruptions, and a louder voice.” Given this idea, people who marched or stood with BLM will not be smiling; rather, they’ll likely look stern to show power to be taken seriously.

Code six is the physical bodily movement performed in an inappropriate manner, such as people who flex their arm muscles, perform yoga poses, or make/avoid direct eye contact in inappropriate times with the camera. The duration of eye contact made by individuals in a video is also important, where if someone was not making eye contact, this showed that they are portraying detachment. Singh, Voggeser, and Göritz (2021:2) suggest that “eye contact seems to be important in facilitating and maintaining constructive social interactions.” Code seven included what other types of hashtags were added with the Instagram posts besides #BlackLivesMatter. Specifically, I coded for the addition of hashtags unrelated to the movement or its issues. This code was important because users could attach any other hashtags they wanted, which, in keeping with social norms, should relate to the movement itself. An example of this is a post that contains eight hashtags, one of which is #blacklivesmatter, but others include #wifebeater, #cosplaygirl, and #healingcrystals, hashtags that would not be associated with the movement. Code eight noted whether a white subject was an “interloper” or someone who seemed forced into a photo or video environment with Black subjects.

As I went through the data, I inductively created new coding criteria based on emergent patterns in the data. This included cartoon animations and filters placed upon a photo as code nine. Users adding filters or editing photos on Instagram is normative behavior; however, when applied to a social movement, this is perceived as phony or inauthentic (Zillich and Riesmeyer 2021; Savolainen, Uitermark, and Boy 2020). An example of this code was a user taking photos of people marching but inserting a grey and black filter to make the photo appear as if in the past. The use of filters takes attention away from the substance of the post; thus, the attention of a social movement is disregarded (Savolainen et al. 2020).

In addition to coding for cringeyness, I coded to determine if an Instagram users' posts would be considered slacktivist. The first code focused on the effort of the post; this code looked at whether the post or content is original to the user or if they give credit if reposted. For example, an original post with a thoughtful, specific image would show a genuine effort, but if another user takes that photo and submits it as their own just to link it to their profile, that would be considered slacktivism. This may also involve plagiarism where no credit of the original user was given or a classic social media behavior of trying to "piggyback" onto the popularity of a viral post. The second code looked at the quality and length of a given post. This code referred to the description of the post, where a user may focus on either quality or quantity when writing a description. Some users may create long descriptions that don't explain the post's relevance, whereas others may include a brief description straight to the point. Lee and Hsieh (2013) argue that slacktivism often involves moral balancing where a person may respond to a current opportunity based on their past behavior or how they feel. People who make a long

personal reflection may be seen as slacktivists since they reflect on a personal attitude or belief rather than make a brief summary about the post.

The third code focused on how many relevant hashtags were placed on a specific post for slacktivism. Fewer relevant hashtags on a post were interpreted as lazy since having more relevant hashtags on a post will likely gain long-period popularity (Ma, Sun, and Cong 2013). The fourth code identified posts that sought to exploit the Black Lives Matter movement. This followed Wood's (2018) identification of similar exploitation of the #MeToo movement. For example, a user may post something with no relation to the BLM movement but attach or "hijack" the hashtag. For example, a user may use #BlackLivesMatter to advance their own selfish goals, including marketing their own business. The fifth code focused on cause-marketing, defined by Selleck (2010), where a business person sells merchandise around the cause, like Black Lives Matter t-shirt, hats, and so forth. If users were making money by their merchandise and not donating the money back to BLM charities, this was considered slacktivism. If a user explicitly showed that they donated some money back to BLM charities, this could be seen as performative activism or slacktivism, depending on the depth of reflection in the post description.

After coding the posts for cringeyness and slacktivism, I then analyzed the posts to measure performative activism. Unfortunately, past literature could not provide criteria to define performative activism. Because of this issue, I turned to the blog, Mille Team (2020), which provides guidelines for social media influencers on how they should engage in performative activism. The blog discussed nine guidelines; however, I identified four that were relevant to my study. The first guideline from the blog was

telling influencers that protests were not the same as attending a music festival (Mille Team 2020). From this guideline, I developed two coding categories. These were 1) activeness in protests (example: taking photos or participating), and 2) the type of setting, such as music gatherings where people were standing together around those speaking or singing for BLM. For example, white people who gathered around an African American male who was lecturing and singing through a microphone for BLM, would be considered performative activism since the white people are taking the initiative to stand and listen. The third code looked at whether white users allowed African Americans to take over their accounts to bring awareness and educate viewers. This means that a white user would give an African American user access to their account, where they could post a selfie and write a reflection story in the description. The fourth code identified users who posted quotes from black public figures, Civil Rights leaders, or African American poets. Such users can be seen as trying to educate viewers. The fifth code was whether the user indicated that they donate to charities or posted flyers about other BLM charities and future protests. An example of this was a user who engaged in cause-marketing by selling masks to protestors, but they showed that they donated to the BLM charities through Go Fund Me and posted their receipts.

Table 2. Coding Criterion, 1 through 9 for Cringey, Slacktivism, Performative Activism

Cringey	Overly exceptional enthusiasm	Use of props	Excessive Emphasis of words	Inappropriate photos of user and surrounding	Inappropriate Facial Expressions	Inappropriate Physical movement	Other hashtags used	“Interloper” Forced into image	Filters/ Animations
Slacktivism	Effort of the Post	Quality and length	Relevant Hashtags	Exploitation	Cause-marketing				
Performative Activism	Active in Protests	Setting	Let African Americans takeover account	African American Quotes	Donate or post flyers				

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 3. Cringey, Slacktivism, and Performative Activism Criterion among Users and Instagram Posts

Coding Criteria	Number of Users	Number of Posts	% of Total Users	% of Total Posts
Evidence of Cringeyness behavior	29	172	70.73%	70.78%
Evidence of Slacktivism	30	71	73.17%	29.22%
Evidence of Performative Activism	17	127	41.46%	52.26%

From the 243 Instagram posts, 172 posts, or 71 percent, showed evidence of cringeyness, 71 posts, or 29 percent, showed evidence of slacktivism, and 127, or 41 percent, showed evidence of performative activism. (Table 3). While a similar number of users engaged in cringeyness (29 users) and slacktivism (30 users), there were far fewer posts that showed evidence of slacktivism than cringeyness, with cringey posts outnumbering slacktivists posts more than two to one. Only 17 users, or 41 percent, engaged in performative activism, which was far less on the total number of users compared to both evidence of cringey behavior slacktivism. However, there were more posts that engaged in performative activism (127, or 52 percent) than slacktivist posts (71, or 29 percent).

The vast majority of posts, over 70 percent, showed some evidence of cringeyness. Many of these users showed evidence of being cringey by how little effort was placed upon the post to show support for BLM. An example of this was Wesley.

Wesley posted a photo of himself, shirtless with round sunglasses at a lake, and posed in three stances: two of him facing the camera with his arms crossed and another pose of him faced backwards and turning around giving the middle finger. Wesley also attached yellow words that portrayed BLACK LIVES MATTER and ACAB. Wesley's post description reflected on his thoughts in the expression of appearing tough and sassy while explaining his perspective of what BLM stood for from protests in the '50s. This post showed cringey behavior by providing a sassy and long-length description, while the user performed inappropriate bodily movements at a lake within the photo.

Thirty users engaged in slacktivism, though the total number of slacktivist posts was only 29 percent. For example, Ryan was a white male who had four posts that each included multiple photos. In one post, Ryan included 13 hashtags, including #blacklivesmatter, but the photos in the post portrayed Ryan being in the military with screenshots about the military pay. Ryan does not explain the relevance of his post towards BLM in the description; this could also be seen as exploitation where the military pay is the main focus over BLM. Chelsea was a white female who posted an image of her kissing her husband and holding their arms in the sunset. The post contained five hashtags, four of which don't explain the relation with BLM besides #blacklivesmatter.

In contrast to slacktivism, only 17 users engaged in performative activism, but performative activist posts were 52 percent. Many users undertook performative activism by their efforts of actively advocating or donating to support BLM. An example of this was Susan and Katy. Susan posted an image of Black Lives Matter in caps and in large black font while her description briefly told users to be safe during protests. Susan also attached three links where viewers could click and donate in support of the BLM protests.

Katy posted several photos, including many showing white people holding signs and protesting with African Americans. Katy’s post description was brief, ‘March to end corruption in law enforcement.’

Common Themes

Table 4. Common Themes

Theme	Number of Users	Amount of Posts	% of Total Users	% of Total Posts
Lack of Knowledge toward BLM	26	55	63.41%	22.63%
Recycled Images	17	71	41.46%	29.22%
Expert or Role Model	22	22	53.66%	9.05%
Action of Exploitation	16	36	39.02%	14.81%

Based on the 41 white users from Instagram and the 243 Instagram posts regarding #BlackLivesMatter from May 25, 2020 to June 21, 2020, I found several prevalent themes repeating in my data that described patterns of cringeyness, slacktivism, and performative activism. The first theme involved a lack of knowledge of Black Lives Matter, where white users were unsure or portraying mixed messages. The second theme was about the role of photos on whether users were recycling or reposting images and not giving credit to the user who originally posted the image. The third theme was posters as self-proclaimed “experts” who were white people telling others what actions they should be doing for BLM. The fourth theme was the exploitation of BLM, where there was little

to no relation of the post to the movement – yet the BLM hashtag was present.

Exploitation occurred in two ways, the posting images of props that relate to the BLM movement, which should be the main focus of the post but were not, and images or videos of the user performing an action that has no correspondence with the movement. Most frequently in this study, users behaved in the second type of exploitation – the user(s) would use images or videos of themselves that show them performing an action with little to no relation to BLM.

Lack of Knowledge

From the 41 white Instagram users examined, there was evidence that 26, or 63.41 percent, of the white users, did not understand the message of the Black Lives Matter Movement resulting in many cringey posts (Table 4). Anne was a female social media influencer who posted an image that included a ‘selfie’ of herself smiling with white text overlapping that said ‘BLACK LIVES MATTER.’ Anne had this text in bold a font where every letter was capitalized. When looking at the selfie, Anne was smiling at the phone, and her right arm was raised up near eye-level to emphasize her face. In the description, Anne wrote in a first-person narrative utilizing the word ‘we’ to tell the viewer they have a choice and should be eager to act swiftly. One thing to note was that Anne was comparing white privilege to that of being a superhero power where this can magically “fight the bad”; however, Anne does not elaborate on what “the bad” was:

We can stand by and watch the injustices that are happening all around us or we can stand with the black community. We can think of George Floyd as a stranger or a brother. We can ignore their cries or cry with them. Your silence will change nothing. Take a stand. Stand up for the lives that have been lost. We have WHITE

privilege and with that privilege we can save lives. White privilege isn't a bad thing but we can use it to fight the bad.

When applying Face Theory (Metts and Cupach 2008), Anne's facial expression from the post created a social front where, if a viewer were to see the photo of Anne just smiling with no other action with the overlay text "BLACK LIVES MATTER." This would suggest that Anne was taking advantage of the movement for views since there is nothing else in the post relating to BLM except to the overlay text. Anne showed that she had given no thought to the photo in relation to BLM, no other reference to BLM other than the caption, and posting something with no relation to BLM other than the caption, all of which indicated slacktivism.

Becky was a white female who posted a cartoon illustrated by another person from 2017. The cartoon had three panels, which symbolized different historical periods of time. The first panel had an African American slave kneeling on the ground where his facial expression appears as if in pain, brought by the white slave owner telling the slave to "GET UP!!" The second panel had an African American sitting down on a chair with his back turned to a white male who was standing and shouting "GET UP!!" while a sign in the background reads "WHITES ONLY." The third panel had an African American football player kneeling while Donald Trump was yelling "GET UP!!" while the background was a football stadium. Becky included a first-person statement that was all capitalized except one word, "WE can BE BETTER HUMANS!!" By posting these illustrations, which were reused from others' posts, Becky was virtue signaling to viewers that she was aware of the racism and oppression of African Americans. Becky and her post also showed evidence of slacktivism as the post was not hers, rather taken from

someone with no credit given in the description. The post also contained a brief five-worded sentence with five hashtags that reflected upon the meaning of racism and racial oppression, but was not explained well in the description.

Rachel was a white female who posted a photo found online. In the post, a long sentence was in white while inside a black photo. The photo refers to Taylor Swift accusing Donald Trump of white supremacy alongside Kanye West wearing a MAGA hat where he was being silent given the issue of African Americans being killed. The photo included a quote about this issue. Rachel only wrote a question in the description while included three emojis of a face with tears of laughing. An interesting aspect to note is that Rachel included 30 hashtags in this post, where the average was 13.97 hashtags. Of these 30 hashtags, only one relates to BLM; #blacklivesmatter. However, Rachel used a hashtag generator, which was located at the bottom of the description by using the '@' symbol. This generator that allowed Rachel to find the most popular hashtags for specific content would receive attention from a target audience (Abeywardana et al. 2018). The post's description took a slacktivist approach where Rachel created a keyword and used the hashtag generator to create relevant hashtags that would be noticed. Since Rachel's post had numerous hashtags while only one was in relation to BLM, this would also fit exploitation because Rachel appears to have been trying to associate her post to non-relevant hashtags; that way, if a person clicked on one of the hashtags that were not in relation to BLM, that person would stumble upon it.

Recycled Images

Of the 41 total users, 17 users or 41.46 percent, posted content that was not credited to the original creators (Table 4). Rachel made another post with the image of a

black background with two panels; the left had the image of Derek Chauvin kneeling on George Floyd's neck that had bold white text above "This..." while the right image had Colin Kaepernick kneeling on the stadium turf with his football teams' attire while the text above is continuing with "...Is Why." This image from Rachel was seen from two other users in my data (Karen and Dylan); however, Dylan included where the image originated and gave credit to that user in their description and post, but the image did not have the bold white text. Because of this lack of credit and alteration of the image, Rachel engaged in what may be seen as plagiarism on social media. Crediting the original source of an image is normative when taking and reposting images found online, as Dylan did. Rachel and Karen, however, did not do this, and thus, both can be seen as slacktivist.

Sharon had one post that included five photos. The first photo was of Floyd's daughter, who had on a white shirt with her father's image with tape over his mouth saying, "I CAN'T BREATHE." The first image also had the daughter look at the camera and had her left fist raised in the air. The second image was Floyd's daughter taking a picture of an image with her as a toddler with her father. The third photo was the daughter holding the previous image up and being photographed with it as she was smiling. The fourth photo had the daughter posing like the first photo, but with a stern or frowning expression. The fifth photo had the daughter taking a picture of another black male with a female helping the daughter raise and hold the camera. For each image, the original photographer and the user who posted were given credit. Even though Sharon was showing support for BLM, there was no other indication that Sharon was doing anything else, which is slacktivism. Sharon's efforts appeared to be more of a social front to show viewers that she, as a user, acknowledged and supported BLM even though

her effort of the post was not an original. The description of the post is a brief sentence with a fist emoji attached that compares Floyd and his daughter where she too “will change the world.” Sharon also includes a paragraph in the description that is quoted from the user who reposted the photos. Therefore, Sharen engaged in slacktivism.

Emily was a white female who had one post which included three photos. The first photo was an illustration of a light blue background with George Floyd having his eyes closed while surrounded by flowers in the shape of a circle. The image had text on the top that reads “Justice For George” where some of the letters were in cursive. The second photo was an illustration of Breonna Taylor with her eyes closed as well, but the flowers instead, are in a line below her body with the same text, but her name included “Justice For Breonna.” The third photo was an illustration of Ahmaud Arbery, who had his eyes closed, but the flowers were circled around as done with Floyd. The text above the illustration followed the same wording “Justice For Ahmaud.” The user did not include a description, only #blacklivesmatter, and credit to the individual who created the illustrations by using the ‘@’ symbol followed by the user’s profile name. The first illustration of George Floyd was posted often by users who would take the image and post it on their profiles but not give credit to the creator. Because of this recycled illustration, which demonstrated minimal effort, Emily demonstrated slacktivism.

The “Experts”

From the 41 total white users and the 243 Instagram posts, 22 or 53.66 percent, of the white users portrayed themselves to be the role model or the ‘self-proclaimed’ expert (Table 4), who knows and tells white people what they should be doing for the Black Lives Matter Movement. These users were more likely to see themselves as role models

or teachers based on the context of their posts. Phyllis was a white female who specialized in holistic health services. Phyllis reposted an image from another user where credit was given in the description. The post is a four-quadrant image that measures and defines fragility and the nature of being an ally to the movement, while breaking down two forms of each by having arrows point from the term to the words that could be associated. The top left quadrant was in red and about 'Authentic Allyship,' the top right was yellow about 'Performative Allyship,' the bottom left is 'White Fragility,' and the bottom right is 'Weaponised White Fragility.' The quadrants with fragility were both in pink but with curvy purple arrows compared to straight black arrows on the quadrants with allyship. Each of the four quadrants included bold black text that are each in capital letters. Phyllis included a lengthy description where emojis of two opened hands are placed before the sentences to display 'awe.' Phyllis gave a preaching formatted description as if she knew more about race and white privilege where her tone was talking down to the viewer:

Let's break it down, shall we? 🙌 After some #selfreflection decide where you fall within these descriptions, and adjust accordingly. 🙌 Anyone (especially #whitefolks) desiring a thoughtful, respectful, and honest dialogue about #racialequality, #whiteprivilege, and #antiracism please feel free to private message me. 🙌 Let's talk about it.

The description also included a sentence that if a viewer wanted to discuss Phyllis's post and knowledge, they should privately message her. Phyllis engaged in both cringeiness and slacktivism by writing in a tone where she created a status talking down to others as "the expert," while posting an image found online. Phyllis was expecting any viewer to

acknowledge that they (the user) were a firm supporter of BLM because she spoke as though she was an expert. A small but interesting pattern emerged in the data on this topic of self-professed expertise; users who identified themselves in their profiles as massage therapists or specialized in mental healing such as holistic medicine were more likely to see themselves as ‘the experts’ in relation to BLM.

Dylan was a white male and a blogger who posted an image of a black background with a sentence in a bold silver font where personal pronouns such as ‘you,’ ‘us,’ and ‘we’ are each capitalized. The sentences also included slang words such as ‘ain’t’ and ‘wit.’ The image itself was taken from another source online, but no credit to the source was given. Dylan’s description was a long paragraph that has bolded text to specify the important ideals to know and understand. One specific bolded word was “checkmyprivilege.” Dylan said he gave a reflected lecture on knowing and checking his white privilege every day. The tone of Dylan’s description was similar to Phyllis’, where the description was preaching to the viewer and telling them what they should do while referring to a past mistake he had done:

This is your platform and im (sic) here to elevete my voice to convey that message to all of my friends and family. Every day i (sic) need to **checkmyprivilege** (sic) and do better everyday. My internalized racism was transcended upon me and i (sic) carry that burden an in return im (sic) here to help any way i (sic) can...We need to teach ourselves about the pain I caused her and the stain of my people that have left an everlasting mark on her and it’s for me to bear the burden and im (sic) happy to do so.

Most of Dylan's posts follow this perspective that as a white male, he knows and explains what white people should be doing for the black community. Dylan engaged in moral balancing by looking back to a negative action he had done, aiming to tell viewers that they should 'check their privilege' when thinking about BLM. Given the text in the post, Dylan was engaging in cultural appropriation, taking from another's culture, which can consist of "intellectual property, cultural expressions or artifacts, history and ways of knowledge" (Ziff and Rao 1997:1). Dylan was culturally appropriating dialect, such as 'wit' and 'ain't' from African Americans and posting it to show that he knew what BLM is about and tried to direct others to his mindset. The description was cringey because of the context, where words were not capitalized while one word was in bold. The slang text in the image and the description was cringey; this can also be seen as an example of cultural appropriation, whereas the image found online by Dylan was slacktivism since this was low-effort.

Lindsey was a white female that identified herself as a "mental health warrior" in her user biography. Lindsey posted a video that has a duration of ten minutes and fifty seconds, with her vocalizing her opinion on what white people should be doing for BLM. During this video, Lindsey was making numerous hand gestures as a way of speaking while nodding her head back and forth and closing her eyes every so often when stating an important aspect. Lindsey appeared dressed in a faded blue shirt with a circular peace symbol on the front with different colors filling in the closed spots. When speaking in the video, Lindsey took on a defensive stance where she explained to her audience (Lindsey acknowledges a joining viewer's name) that if she lost friends just because they don't agree with her narrative, that's their problem. Lindsey continued on telling the viewers,

or specifically the “network marketers,” they should “get louder” based upon their beliefs. During her response, Lindsey paused and broke eye contact to decide on what next to say and how to say it. From the description, Lindsey just has five questions that were aimed at users who help introduce or grow awareness on products to question themselves on whether they would take a bigger step with BLM. In relation to the cringey and slacktivism criteria, Lindsey and her video were cringey by how she speaks to the viewer while she was taking some form of action toward the movement. Lindsey made eye contact with the camera; however, she looked away quite often, which gave the feeling of detachment even though she was using hand gestures that showed a favorable feeling to the viewer (Gibson and Gore 2016). Regarding cringeyness, Lindsey did not maintain a constructive social interaction (Singh et al. 2021) of making consistent eye contact, which is important when talking to an audience.

Exploitation

Given the 243 Instagram posts and 41 white users, 39.02 percent of users engaged in exploitation which was 14.81 percent of the total posts. These posts showed exploitation by either posting images and/or props or images and/videos of the user performing an action that have nothing to do with the movement. These actions and the context of the post description have no relation with the BLM movement, instead being done for self-gain. Dylan made another post where he took a selfie while shirtless and wearing a black mask over his ears and below his chin. Dylan had his right arm raised, his chest slouching a bit, and had his head tilted to the left. Dylan was looking directly at the camera but not smiling; he was also looking grizzled from not shaving in a while. The background of the post appeared to be a bathroom with a metal pole as a guardrail and

two pictures on the wall. Dylan included a description that addressed viewers telling them ‘goodnight’ and that they shouldn’t “lose (sic) sight what the end goal is.” Dylan included five hashtags where three related to BLM, while the other two are questionable such as #respectmyhair. When observing Dylan and his body pose with Face Theory (Metts and Cupach 2008), Dylan gave an uncomfortable or unpleasant feeling to the viewer by looking down and squinting at the camera where his eyes were hard to see while appearing sweaty and grizzled from not shaving. Because of this, Dylan’s post was both cringey and slactivist because there was no elaboration as to how these actions were helping support BLM.

Lindsey posted a ten-minute video where she was in her kitchen near the stove marinating chicken with some type of dressing. After messing with the food and utensils, Lindsey would often back away and turn towards the camera recording. During these moments, Lindsey would discuss different diets such as Keto while making hand and arm movements, smiling and giggling, and twerking³ to the viewers. Lindsey was wearing jean shorts and a black tee-shirt with text that appears as, ‘I am your Ally’ that is in white, except ‘Ally’ is in red. For the duration of the video, Lindsey was cooking the chicken and discussing her tips to eating and staying in shape by the Keto diet while making references to the police. The description of the video refers to the Keto diet and about the chicken that was cooked. There were eight hashtags included where #blacklivesmatter was the outcast compared to #getinmymouth or #ketorecipes. After watching and observing the video, Lindsey gave an uncomfortable and questionable feeling to the viewer by discussing a particular diet, making faces, and dancing while

³ Twerking was notable by Miley Cyrus performing at the 2013 Video Music Awards Performance (Zink 2016). Twerking was originally noted in “ratchet culture” among African Americans (Lewis 2013).

cooking where being cautious was non-existent. In relation to Face Theory and Expressive Behavior (Metts and Cupach 2008; Crossly 1995), Lindsey had made eye contact on and off while performing unpleasant and cringey actions such as sticking her tongue out at the camera or twerking near the hot stove that had hot cooking oil inside.

Caroline was a white female who posted an image that was in black and grey due to a color filter. The image was about Caroline and another person, and both dressed in cosplaying costumes that resemble cartoon or anime characters posing in two different stances within four quadrants of the photo. Caroline's friend was on the top left and right while Caroline was on the bottom left and right. The friend was holding an iPhone that had an image with bold black letters saying "BLACK LIVES MATTER" with a black fist in the middle. The friend was staring straight at the camera on the top left while their left fist raised in the air, whereas, on the right, the friend tilts their head to the right with their eyes closed in the direction of the iPhone, but instead made a hand gesture as if in prayer on the left hand. On the bottom left, Caroline had her eyes closed, and head tilted forward with her hands together as if praying. On the bottom right, Caroline had her eyes closed, right fist in the air but not past her head, while having her left hand placed on her chest. Within the description, Caroline inserted a quote from the cartoon or anime character followed by an analogy linking a fictional war to being the equivalent of the violence of racism and the death of African Americans.

Caroline included twenty-five hashtags where half were relating to BLM while the other half was in relation to the cosplaying and cartoon/anime. Caroline's post demonstrated slacktivism by including the non-BLM-related hashtags. In terms of being cringey, the post contained Caroline and her friend cosplaying as fictional characters

while giving a quote from a said character. This, by any means, has no relation and exploits the BLM movement. From Face Theory and Expressive Behavior (Metts and Cupach 2008; Crossley 1995), Caroline was showing that cosplaying and making poses of praying or raising their fist was acceptable where any viewer can inappropriately perform a physical movement for a movement.

The Relationships Between Performative Activism, Cringeyness, and Slacktivism

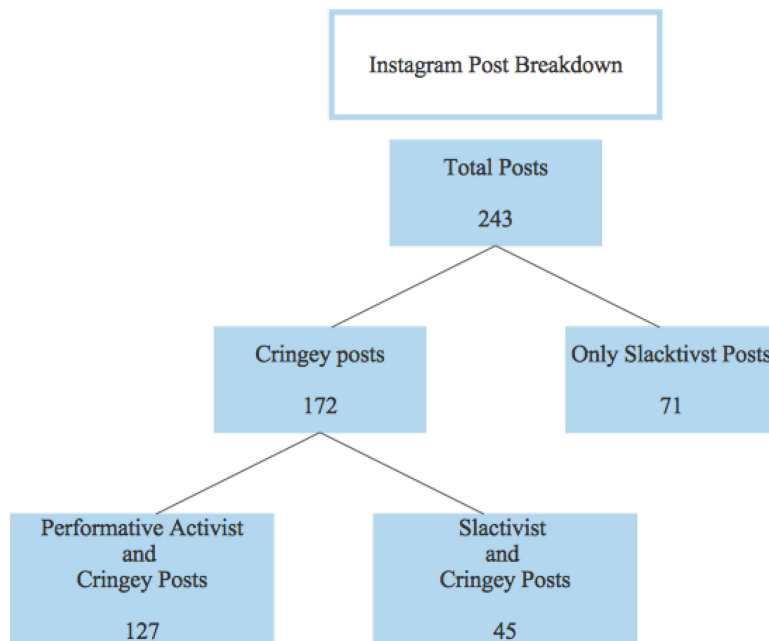


Figure 1. Instagram Post Breakdown Model

On the research question ‘What is the relationship between cringeyness and slacktivism?’, there was a weak association with posts being both cringey and slacktivist. Given the total of 243 posts, there were far less posts on slacktivism than those associated with cringeyness, and only 45 total posts that displayed both cringeyness and slacktivism. While that there was only a weak association between cringeyness and slacktivism, there was a stronger association between cringeyness and performative activism. There were close to three times as many posts that were cringey and performative activist than those

that were cringey and slacktivist. Some examples of cringey and slacktivism were given in the previous sections, such as ‘Lack of Knowledge.’

Robert was a white male who was in the Minnesota area where George Floyd was killed and took photos showing during the protests. Robert met with George Floyd’s brother and personally spoke with people in Minnesota and protested with them. Robert made some posts cringey by adding filters to photos or forcing people into an image to capture what was happening during the BLM protests. One example included the image of a homeless man that held a sign saying, “Silence is violence! I stand with you! #BLM.” What made the post cringey was that out of all the protesters in the BLM movement, Robert took a picture of a white male. This post is an example of being cringey and performative activist, since Robert captures the image of the white male acknowledging the racism and discusses in the description that people want equality.

VI. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to determine whether cringey Instagram posts by white users regarding the Black Lives Matter movement went hand-in-hand with slacktivism to indicate an insincere attempt to capitalize on the social media trend of BLM. The research questions for this study included: Are white users engaging in slacktivism or are they engaging in performative activism? Are white users making cringey posts regarding the Black Lives Matter Movement? What is the relationship between cringeyness and slacktivism?

I created three different coding schemes to determine if posts were cringey, slacktivist, and performative activist. In regards to cringeyness and slacktivism, I found four common themes that white users on Instagram would engage in with the Black Lives Matter Movement: 1) A lack of knowledge about the Black Lives Matter movement; 2) re-posting photos without attributing the original source; 3) self-described white experts on BLM lecturing their peers; 4) exploitation of the BLM movement. In relation to cringeyness, 52.26 percent of posts were cringey and engaged in performative activism, while 18.52 percent of posts were cringey and engaged in slacktivism.

I had predicted that there would be a strong association between cringeyness and slacktivism. In the results, however, I found that there was only a weak association. However, I did find a surprising association between cringeyness and performative activism. A potential future study is to look more closely at the relationship between performative activism and cringeyness, to try to determine why genuine supporters of the movement still tend to engage in cringey activities on Instagram.

Given the results from this study about cringeiness, slacktivism, and performative activism, a potential reason that most posts from white users were both cringey and performative activism is because this allowed them to show support for BLM while being unique or authentic. More specifically, each white user whose post was engaging in performative activism, yet cringey, was what made them stand out compared to another white user. This could explain the 17 users who showed evidence of performative activism, which was fewer compared to the 30 users with evidence of slacktivism. It's also possible that social pressure played a role, where these white users had to post something to show that they were aware of what happened. If a white individual didn't post content showing support for BLM, that person may be criticized or labeled as someone who doesn't care or pay attention to the racial issues.

There were a few limitations in this study. First, I wasn't able to get a random sample due to how Instagram works. Following the removal of the Legacy API and in June 2020 (Instagram 2021), Instagram now only allows businesses and creators access to the data, not users. Because of this, I had to create my own method for obtaining such users and posts. Second, I only had access to information about the users from what they posted on Instagram; thus, I could only infer the motivation or intent of such users. A future study may involve a more in-depth examination of the individual users to address this. In this study, I analyzed the user's profile biography to determine if that user depicted their occupation or recreational role along the user's description within a post to understand more about them. A second future study may include an interview format within Instagram to discuss the user's mindset and actions given the posts during the timeline of this study. Lastly, a third future study could be to apply these same measures

of cringey, slacktivism, and performative activism to other social issues that appear on Instagram. These social issues don't have to be race-specific, which could then be compared to these results to identify whether there is an inherently racist element to Instagram and its users on cringeiness, slacktivism, and performative activism.

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