

# GENDER-BASED AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE ALLYSHIP ON SOCIAL MEDIA

A Toolkit

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This toolkit was created with funding from iMPACTS, a SSHRC Partnership Project under the direction of James McGill professor Dr. Shaheen Shariff.

McGill University was named after a man who had enslaved at least five Black and Indigenous peoples: Jack or Jacques, a Black man (c1760-1838); Sarah, a Black woman (c1763-1809); Marie-Louise, a Black woman who had joined the household as a girl (c1765-1789); an Indigenous boy whose name is unknown (c1768-1778); Marie Potamiane, an Indigenous girl (c1773-1783). James McGill's participation in colonial practices and the transatlantic slave trade helped to establish this institution. The ongoing impacts of these realities continue to affect Black and Indigenous communities throughout this institution today.

McGill University is situated in Tiohtià:ke/Montréal, on the unceded Indigenous territory of the Kanien'kehá:ka, Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg (1). Gender-based violence in so-called "Canada" disproportionately impacts Indigenous women (2). We recognize that a simple acknowledgment of the traditional caretakers of this land is only the bare minimum we can do. We hope that this toolkit can encourage social media users to be more aware of the impacts of gender-based violence and colonialism on Indigenous peoples.



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# WHY WE MADE THIS

Well before the COVID-19 lockdowns began, social media activism, sometimes called "hashtag activism"(3) has been a part of internet culture. Even in the early days of Twitter, hashtags were used to help spread information and updates about different events happening across the globe (4). When the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns hit North America (specifically, Canada and the United States), those of us with steady access to technology and internet found ourselves more dialled in to social media than ever before. Thus, it is an important moment within which to consider the politics and ethics of social media use.

Recognizing our privilege as individuals and using it to uplift marginalized voices is crucial. Allyship includes an ongoing process of listening, learning and educating, and holding yourself and those around you accountable. However, allyship cannot and will not ever be a trend. Educating ourselves on historical and current injustices - whatever they may be - must go beyond sharing hashtags and infographics. We hope that this toolkit inspires students across McGill and other university campuses to start or continue deepening their understanding of social justice issues and how this issues are affected by social media use.

The Anti-Oppression Network (5) defines allyship as an active, consistent, and arduous practice of unlearning and re-evaluating, in which a person in a position of privilege and power seeks to operate in solidarity with a marginalized group



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# ALLYSHIP VS PERFORMATIVE ALLYSHIP

Allyship is an ongoing process of learning and educating individuals on the lived realities of marginalized people/groups (6). It involves using your privilege to take action and stand up for marginalized peoples, following the goals of those same people and centring their voices and experiences. Allyship can only truly be defined by those who we are hoping to be allies to. Being an "ally" is not something that we assign to our own identities, it is something we work towards. It is an earned recognition from a community.

Performative allyship is a term used to describe disingenuous "allyship": when people are more interested in being recognized as an ally rather than being truly committed to supporting causes and/or movements. Performative allyship is a performance, often being put on by cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied and/or white people who view social justice discourse as a trend.



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# SHARING CONTENT

Now more than ever, students are engaging with social justice movements via social media platforms. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, many (if not all) areas of our lives have shifted online. Hashtags, infographics, petitions and the re-sharing of these advocacy tools are all a part of the social media activism that has become part of the day-to-day for many people, especially students.

While social media is not yet accessible to everyone, it does provide broader access to information. It also makes participating in activism more accessible to those who may not have the ability to take to the streets and participate in protests. Updates on social media platforms allow users to include captioning to videos, and alternative text additions in comment sections can make images easier to read and create greater access.

For those of us who engage in this discourse online, it is important that we understand the difference between “performative activism” (or “toxic allyship”) and authentic allyship. The shallowness of performative activism can prevent substantive action, displace those affected from the core of social movements, which can cause harm overall. It is also important that we recognize allyship is not a trend or identity we choose to give ourselves, but a lifelong process that those we hope to be allies to acknowledge in us.



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# A CLOSER LOOK - RACIAL INJUSTICE

## #BLACKOUTTUESDAY

In June of 2020, days after George Floyd, a 46 year old black man, was murdered by white police officers in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in broad daylight, music executives Jamila Thomas and Brianna Agyeang wanted to lead a moment of mourning with the #TheShowMustBePaused (7). The movement called for major music companies to “pause” on Tuesday, June 2nd to acknowledge the music industry’s long history of profiting off of black artists. Many large names in music took part in this moment, pairing images of black squares with messages of “reflection”, with #TheShowMustBePaused and another phrase: “Black Out Tuesday”. Soon, black squares paired with the #BlackOutTuesday began flooding people's feeds. Many individuals added the #BlackLivesMatter (and/or the #BLM) to their posts to show support for the broader Black Lives Matter movement. Black Lives Matter activists urged for people to stop using the #BlackLivesMatter and #BLM in their #TheShowMustBePaused posts, as these black squares were preventing important information and resources from BLM organizers from being found under the #BlackLivesMatter and #BLM (8).

Unfortunately, the message was not received and the posts continued. But by the next day, many of the accounts (individuals, organizations or brands) who had shared black squares would move away from the conversations on race. For many, #BlackOutTuesday was just a trend.

Before using hashtags in your posts, make sure to verify where they come from and what their purpose is. Using a hashtag just because you see others using it could be harmful as it may draw attention away from important resources.



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# A CLOSER LOOK: RAINBOW-WASHING

Pride Month, which, in honour of the Stonewall Uprising of 1969 takes place in June, is a time of commemoration, celebration, and overall pride for 2SLGBTQIA+ communities (9). But rainbow-washing is all too much of a reality during this time of celebration. Rainbow-washing is a form of performative activism that is used by large brands during Pride. It involves adding rainbows, rainbow colours, or pride slogans to products (clothing, accessories, product packaging, etc.) to “show support” for 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, while doing limited to no tangible work for the communities. Further, large corporations who have the ability to (unethically) outsource production and sell products for cheaper are taking away business from 2SLGBTQIA+ led companies. The profits of these companies continue to rise, but none of the money is going to help the people they claim to be supporting. Other examples of rainbow-washing could include governments spending thousands to paint rainbow crosswalks or murals around their cities without thinking about how the money might be better spent supporting their local 2SLGBTQIA+ communities (10). When sharing content related to 2SLGBTQIA+ communities and/or Pride Month, consider posts that are from organizations or individuals promoting the well-being of 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. These may be more impactful to share than corporate media material.

When reposting any informative posts or stories, make sure to verify *where* the information is coming from, and *who* is sharing it.

*Who created the post you're sharing? Do they include sources or give credit to the creator?*





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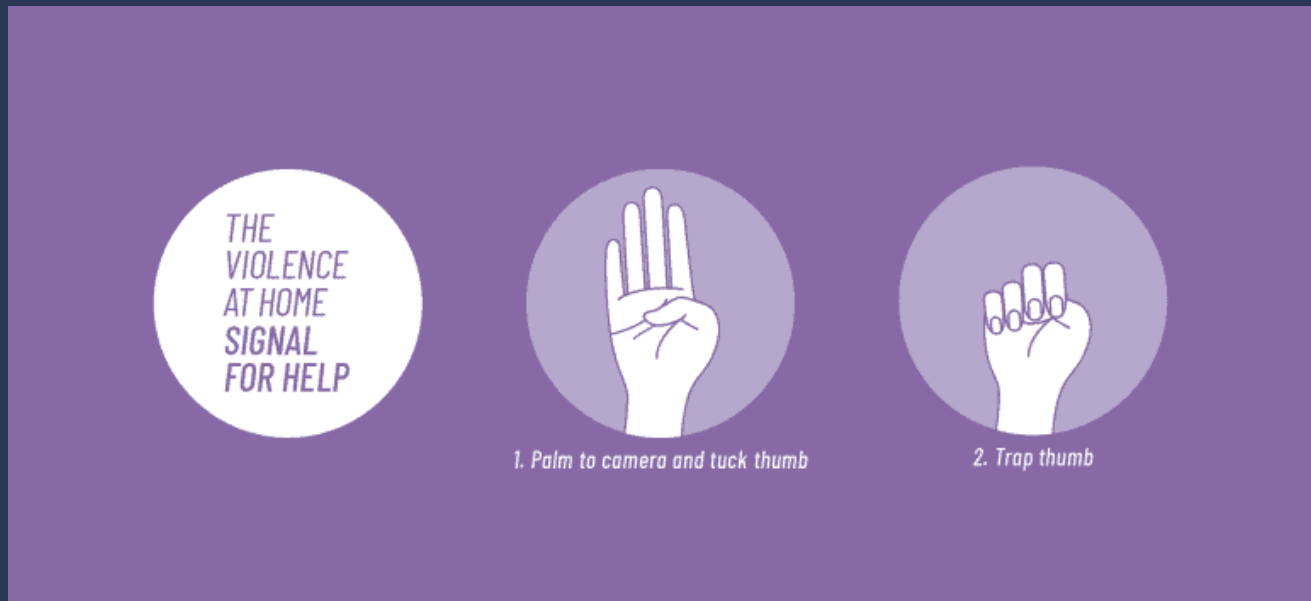
## A CLOSER LOOK: INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Before the pandemic, 1 in every 2 women had already been experiencing gender-based violence (11). In 2021, there were 26 femicides in Quebec (12). The province had passed the yearly average before the end of summer (13). Peterman et al. (2020) discuss the many ways that pandemics can “provide an enabling environment that may exacerbate or spark diverse forms of violence” (14). The pandemic forced most of us to stay inside and to endure new intense forms of pressure, and also a sense of fear when leaving our homes. As you can imagine, this sense of fear, which perpetrators easily use as a scare tactic, forced survivors to choose between a deadly virus and an unsafe home. This past October, a young woman was stabbed to death near McGill's downtown campus by her former roommate (15). As we start to near an ‘end’ of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important that we hold elected officials accountable and support survivors of intimate partner violence, domestic violence, and sexual and gender-based violence. We must recognize what has been highlighted by the pandemic and not let these numbers continue to rise.



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# INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE: CANADIAN WOMEN'S FOUNDATION - SIGNAL FOR HELP



The "Signal For Help" is a tool created by the Canadian Women's Foundation which can be discreetly used by individuals experiencing domestic violence. The signal was launched as a response to the COVID-19 lockdowns and a rise of intimate partner violence. Survivors can use the signal through video calls to signal that they need help. From there, someone can provide support by asking yes/no questions to understand what kind of support they need (16).

The "Signal For Help" was advertised throughout social media platforms, especially TikTok, and became recognizable in many places globally. The "Signal For Help" was used by a young woman who had been missing from her home in the U.S. (17). This is a great example of how social media and technology can work to spread awareness and information about gender-based violence and provide support.



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# CREATING CONTENT

When creating your own content, it is important to first and foremost recognize what your intentions are - there is no need to reinvent the wheel.

Creating content related to gender-based violence, like any other social justice issue, requires critical thinking when researching information, and sensitivity to the subject. It is important to find credible sources for information and images, be sensitive to the language you choose to use, and always remember to centre the voices at the core of the subject.

IN THIS SECTION, WE WILL FOCUS ON FOUR SUBTOPICS FOR CREATING GBV RELATED CONTENT:

01 Avoiding re-traumatization

02 Language and terminology

03 Sensitive content & imaging

04 Collecting information from credible sources



# CREATING CONTENT

01

## Avoiding Re-Traumatization:

Adding content and trigger warnings ("CW/TW") to posts on social media - either written or photo/video content - is important when posting or sharing any sensitive or graphic content. Content warnings can warn viewers about potentially upsetting topics that will follow (phobias, nudity, etc.). Trigger warnings function as content warnings for more specific topics that may re-traumatize individuals with varying experiences.

02

## Language and terminology:

It is important when creating any informative posts (or just any posts with writing) to use appropriate language. Understanding terminology that is related to Gender-Based Violence is important for educational purposes and formal intervention measures. For example, understanding when to use "sexual harassment" or "sexual assault", or choosing a broader term like "domestic violence" over "intimate partner violence". It is also key to acknowledge the impact that words can have (e.g. "survivor" vs. "victim").

*Western University Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children* has created a [glossary of terminology](#) related to Gender-Based Violence that includes sources and places to learn more.

*The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)* has released a glossary entitled: "[Sexual and Gender-Based Violence: A Glossary from A to Z](#)".

Using appropriate hashtags to make content more visible, and to clarify/highlight themes in your posts.

## When including personal identifiers...

If sharing information from someone else (or personal stories), check or ask the pronouns (e.g. he, she, they, ze, etc.) or terminology that the person(s) uses and/or is comfortable with you using. Make sure to always use current pronouns when telling transgender peoples' stories.



# CREATING CONTENT

03

## Sensitive Content & imaging:

- If sharing a personal story, always check that you are only using images that the survivor wants to be included
- Do not use stock images showing brutalized individuals that could easily re-traumatize survivors. Rather, use images of places where events occurred.
- Do not use stock images showing women drinking or other scenarios that would play into victim-blaming stereotypes

04

## Collecting Information from Credible Sources:

Verify your information by...

- Checking who the author is. *Are they considered experts in this area (academic titles, personal experience)?*
- Checking if the information is up to date, when necessary. *Are you using the most recent statistics?*
- Reflecting on the relevance of the information to your post.

## Some useful sources for reliable information:

- [Canadian Women's Foundation - Gender-Based Violence in Canada](#)
- [UNHCR - Gender-based Violence](#)
- [World Health Organization \(WHO\) - Violence against women](#)
- [Government of Canada - Provincial and territorial resources on gender-based violence](#)



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# CONCLUSION

Being an active participant in online discussions against hate and discrimination is important but is only effective if you yourself are equipped with the proper tools to:

- 1) recognize your privilege and place;
- 2) take care of your own mental health; and
- 3) engage critically with social media.

Social media has been known to set unrealistic expectations for how individuals (especially young people) should be living their lives. It is a place to share and view the filtered highlights of our reality, and can place unnecessary pressure to live a "better" or more glamorous life. With the rise of made-for-social-media infographics being shared through stories or links in bios, a similar pressure has been placed on individuals who may feel an ethical obligation to speak out against injustice and feel that sharing posts on social media is our only option with which to do that.

But perhaps we have to ask ourselves if there are certain social issues that it isn't our place to be a vocal representative for. That's not to say we shouldn't speak up about issues affecting people from different social locations from us. When thinking about what and how we share things online, we can ask ourselves: does sharing this potentially make an impact for the benefit of the communities the post is about? Are there ways I can get involved in activism in real life? Are there any potentially negative repercussions to me sharing this and should I be part of this conversation? How can I investigate what I share online so that I'm sharing the material that might make the most positive impact?



# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hi! My name is Sam Nepton and I am a fourth-year student in the Faculty of Education. I have been working on the iMPACTS project since early 2021 and am thrilled to finally be sharing this toolkit!



As I mentioned already, the idea for this toolkit came from my own experience with the rise of "social media activism" during the COVID-19 pandemic. I had a lot of discussions with people who felt pressured to be posting about every issue that came across their timelines, and likewise with people who felt frustrated with those who were not resharing any posts. Ultimately, this toolkit is meant to be an easily accessible introductory resource for those who have been, or may one day engage in allyship through social media.

You can reach out to me any time at [samantha.nepton@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:samantha.nepton@mail.mcgill.ca)

I want to thank everyone who helped make this project a reality. I especially want to thank Sarah Towle for helping me come up with the concept, and for believing in me through every step of the project. I could not have done this without your knowledge, guidance and support. I also want to thank Dr. Jessica Wright and Juliet Morrison for supporting my ideas, guiding me through the editing process, and keeping me accountable for completing this work.



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