Bare minimums in activism do nothing for a cause

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Bare minimums in activism do nothing for a cause

Your safety pins don’t matter. There has been a recent rise in a silent protest to Donald Trump’s racist, xenophobic, sexist and homophobic rhetoric that involves pinning a safety pin onto your shirt. It started off as a gesture of kindness and a message to the marginalized people, saying: “hey, we’re here and we’re not with them.” By pinning your shirt, you have a quiet way to show you do not support Trump’s harmful messages and you are a safe person to talk with.

Safety pinning started after Brexit when the United Kingdom left the EU. Hate crimes rose against immigrants by 57 percent, The Guardian reports, as a result of the break. #Safetypin is a small part of a very broad protest against Brexit, along with various supportive messages towards immigrants, such as “if you wear a hijab, I’ll sit with you on the train” sentiments, rallies and marches throughout the UK and celebrities like J.K. Rowling speaking out against the referendum.

In many ways, a safety pin is also an ingenious symbol to use. You never have them when you need them and no one carries them in their pockets like they might carry gum, a pen or other commonplace objects. They’re cheap and easy to find at your local Walmart, relatively subtle on your person when you wear them and not traditionally used in outfits. Anyone can wear a safety pin. Anyone can be an ally.

But this message doesn’t matter at all if you don’t follow through on the gesture. It’s one thing to say “I’m an ally” and another to actually work toward helping marginalized people like an ally should, as someone not identified as any minority but still dedicated to human rights. The rise of safety pinning has given allies an easy out. By pinning your shirt, you have an excuse to pat yourself on the back for the job well done but then turn around and not help the people you said you would.

Wearing something does not mean you will stand for a cause. What’s happening is slacktivism, a term that blends “slacker” and “activism” together. Many activists say safety pinning is a way to assuage guilt. It is a symbol of allegiance to a cause, but if you really want to make a difference in the world, be active. Donate time and money. Take part in a protest. Support people in your community. Reach out to other activists. Read up on the history of the cause. Find other ways to promote events.

Safety pins have the potential to be a powerful symbolism of unity, but that symbol will ultimately fall flat if you don’t use actions to back up your words. Simply said — put your money where your mouth is.
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