

Tips for Journalists Covering Cancel Culture Incidents

Centering coverage on public figures claiming victimization can itself cause harm

- Often, when cancel culture is invoked as moral panic, the critiques of the marginalized are simplified or misrepresented.
- Centering public figures in the narrative can have the effect of shifting the focus away from them as a perpetrator of harm to the victim.
- In turn, this shifts the focus away from those that were harmed by the action. This is another level of harm as it silences those that rightfully call for accountability measures.

How to cover

- Journalists should center the voices of people targeted by a public figure before bringing up any alleged consequences the individual may have received from the group collective.
- This strategy keeps the focus on the ethical implications of the offensive behavior in question before moving onto the consequences, if any.
- This would allow for the naming of appropriate retribution from those harmed as well as making the critique precise.

Summary: Avoid automatically centering the story around a public figure's statements after the backlash has begun. Take a deeper look at what triggered the backlash first and the related complaints.

Broad strokes to note

Right-leaning media coverage tendencies

- Refer to cancel culture as a real phenomenon and real threat.
- Invoke the cancel culture frame when any figure is facing backlash.
- Rarely seem to examine the essence of cancel culture outside of it being a moral threat.

Center- to left-leaning media coverage tendencies

- Call more attention to the falsehood of cancel culture.
- Or frame it as a method of holding people accountable.
- May say that it doesn't exist.

Complexity:

- When looking at how other news media are covering cancel culture, differentiate opinions or think-pieces about the concept of cancel culture from journalistic reporting on a specific case.

*Sydney Lenocho '22, "The Wolf that Cried Cancel Culture,"
2021-22 Hackworth Fellowship, Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University.*

