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Bernstein Center for Leadership  
and Ethics Research Series

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# Timing Is Everything: Why LGBTQ+ Allyship During Pride Month Could Backfire

## Leadership Implications

- Organizations displaying LGBTQ+ allyship only during Pride Month (June) risk being perceived as inauthentic by the very communities they aim to support.
- LGBTQ+ individuals are particularly attuned to the timing of organizational support statements, while cisgender straight audiences evaluate them similarly, irrespective of timing.
- Perceived inauthenticity can reduce LGBTQ+ employees' sense of belonging and organizational commitment, while also decreasing consumer willingness to pay for products or services.

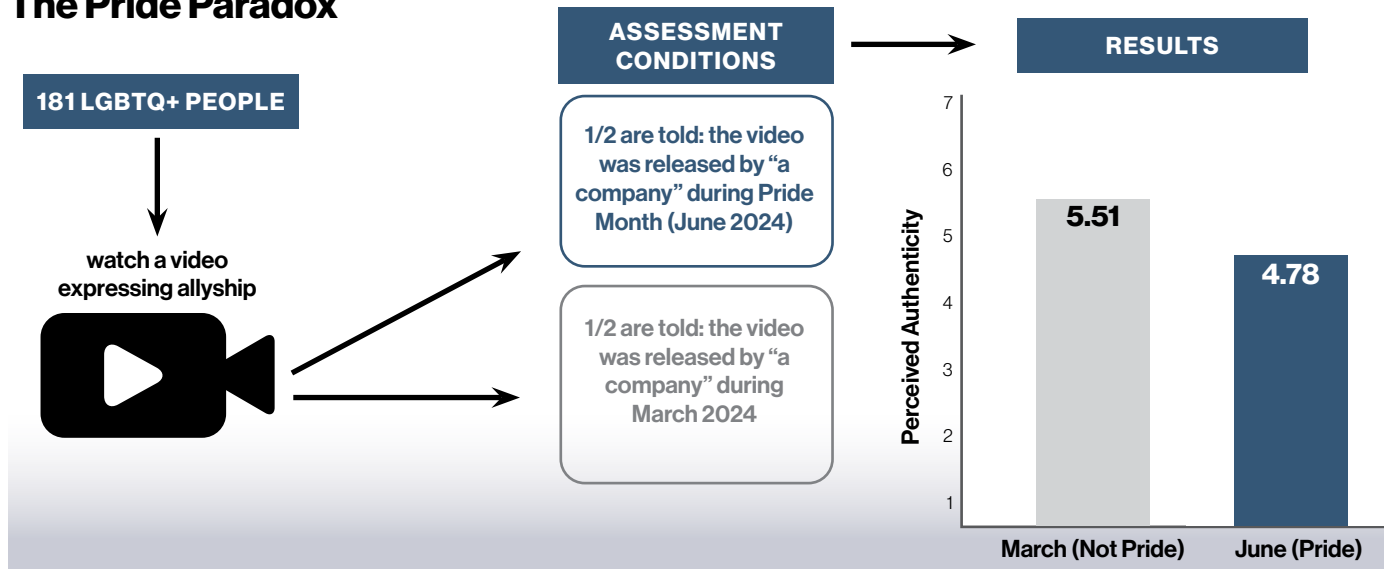
As organizations increasingly seek to demonstrate support for marginalized communities, Pride Month has become a focal point for corporate LGBTQ+ allyship displays. However, new research affiliated with the Bernstein Center for Leadership and Ethics at Columbia Business School reveals that the timing of these displays significantly affects how authentic they appear to LGBTQ+ stakeholders—with potentially counterproductive results.

In “When You Say It: How the Timing of LGBTQ+ Allyship Displays Shapes Evaluations of Organizations,” Columbia Business School Bernstein Research Grant awardee Michael W. White '26, PhD, and co-author, Cornell University Assistant Professor James T. Carter '23, PhD, conducted six tests spanning field studies, laboratory experiments, and online surveys to examine how the timing of allyship influences perceptions of organizational authenticity. Their findings challenge the assumption that all allyship efforts are universally well-received.

## Testing Real-World Reactions

The researchers conducted field studies at LGBTQ+ establishments, including a gay and a queer-owned women's sports bar in the Midwest, to capture authentic reactions from community members. They supplemented these with lab experiments and large-scale online studies involving more than 3,000 participants. In one experiment, LGBTQ+ bar patrons read identical organizational statements supporting the LGBTQ+ community. The only difference between the statements were the release dates — either during Pride Month (June) or another month. Participants consistently rated the Pride Month statement as less authentic, even though the content was identical.

## The Pride Paradox



LGBTQ+ people watched a video expressing allyship. Half of the participants were told the video was released during Pride Month (June); the other half were told it was a different month. Participants assessed the allyship as less authentic during Pride Month.

The pattern held across multiple contexts and formats, from written statements to video advertisements featuring LGBTQ+ content.

**When many organizations act similarly, it becomes difficult for observers to distinguish genuine support.**

The researchers also tested whether this was merely a function of being part of a marginalized group, comparing responses from LGBTQ+ individuals, cisgender-straight individuals, and people of color. Only LGBTQ+ respondents showed sensitivity to timing. The other

groups evaluated allyship statements similarly regardless of when they appeared.

The research revealed that timing affects authenticity perceptions through what psychologists call attribution processes — how people infer the motives behind others’ actions. When organizations display allyship during Pride Month, LGBTQ+ observers are more likely to see strategic motivations at play and less likely to attribute the support to genuine values. This occurs because Pride Month represents what researchers call a “high consensus environment” in which many

organizations act similarly. Thus, it becomes difficult for observers to distinguish genuine support from mere conformity to social expectations.

### Conclusions

The research highlights the importance of considering target audience perspectives when developing diversity and inclusion initiatives. What may seem supportive to majority group members may be perceived differently by the marginalized communities, and the consequences extend beyond perception. LGBTQ+ consumers indicated they would pay nearly 20 percent less for products from companies that displayed allyship during Pride Month compared to other times. Similarly, among employees, Pride Month timing was associated with reduced feelings of belonging and organizational commitment.

For leaders, this underscores a fundamental principle: authenticity cannot be achieved through timing alone, but timing can certainly undermine it. Organizations serious about LGBTQ+ allyship can focus on building genuine, values-driven relationships with these communities year-round, rather than relying on high-visibility moments that may inadvertently signal opportunism.

#### Read the full working paper:

**When You Say It: How the Timing of LGBTQ+ Allyship Displays Shapes Evaluations of Organizations**

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#### Related articles:

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