



ARTICLE

“So the Last Will Be First”: Cancel Culture as an Instrument of Symbolic Policy

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the phenomenon of “cancel culture” through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic space. This approach allows us to go beyond traditional ethical and political frameworks, connecting cancel culture to the processes of building collective identity through social exclusion and ostracism. In order to establish its boundaries, a community needs to define specific symbolic capital, which is reflected in both unifying symbols and the ways it distinguishes itself from others. This opposition is primarily expressed through negative symbols that help create a distinct identity. Cancel culture functions as a tool in the struggle for symbolic capital, leading to a restructuring of roles within the social landscape. This results in the emergence of four distinct groups: the “canceled,” the “cancelers–initiators,” the “cancelers–executors,” and the “authorities.” The interactions among these groups foster the development of new identities. It is concluded that in today's public space, where virtualization accelerates the creation and dissemination of identifying symbols, various forms of identity are being formed. The process of canceling initiates a dual dynamic: it not only defines the identity of the canceling community but also encourages the communities of those canceled to fight for a positive redefinition of their own symbolic capital.

KEYWORDS

cancel culture, ostracism, ethics, identity, identification, symbolic space, symbolic politics, community, exclusion

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So the last will be first, and the first will be last.

—Matthew 20:1–16

Introduction

Cancel culture, a contemporary form of the social phenomenon known as ostracism, has recently fueled a surge in scholarly attention. As cancel culture has evolved, this concept has gradually acquired new meanings and is becoming an increasingly significant topic in academic discourse. The growing diversity of approaches and the wealth of empirical evidence regarding specific instances of cancellation—many of which have destructive effects—necessitate a theoretical analysis. This analysis should focus on defining the mechanisms of understanding and examining the potential consequences for social reality.

Cancel culture most commonly refers to a situation in which “a person or group of people loses support and is subjected to public condemnation in professional or other communities, social groups, and on social media” (Semenenko, 2023; Trans. by Daniil Anikin & Dina Ivanova—D. A. & D. I.). Cancel culture can manifest itself as criticism or condemnation directed at an individual or event, targeting a specific person or group, and relating to the past, present, or future, including actions or statements made in either the real or virtual world. The concept of cancel culture can receive a broad range of interpretations. Its complex structure, which includes chaotic manifestations of certain elements, creates specific difficulties in understanding. One way or another, it can be said that those who are canceled or in the process of being canceled are expelled by a community, becoming outsiders deprived of a voice and agency in the social space.

Cancel culture is a relatively new mechanism that influences society. It is considered that “cancel culture provides average citizens the collective power to demand accountability from powerful, influential, and well-insulated individuals and organizations” (Roldan et al., 2024). The emergence of such an effect is closely related to virtualization, which has provided new opportunities for interacting with information. On the one hand, it involves the recording or preservation of information about an event, including screenshots of posts, video clips, etc., and on the other hand, it involves dissemination. Thus, the context for future cancellation arises not in physical, but in virtual space. The tools made available by the development of the Internet have changed the ways community members interact and expanded their geographical reach, leading to the movement of groups from a local level to a public one. Physical

space significantly limited the range and timing of information dissemination. Previously, society could not respond quickly to an action or event and meanwhile the information could be distorted or fail to reach its audience altogether. Virtualization does not make an event true, but it accelerates the process, allowing almost anyone with basic digital skills to join the community.

The public space has become a prerequisite for the existence of cancel culture. In the past, a person facing social condemnation or being boycotted could shed that status by changing their physical location, but in the modern era, this is no longer possible.

Further important aspect involves issues of ethics and morality. Each instance of cancellation touches on moral questions inherent in an individual's life, including women's rights, the existence and number of genders, and the marginalization of socially vulnerable groups. Thus, society invokes moral principles by pointing out behaviors that contradict established norms. Campbell (2023) writes,

generally speaking, however, the direct engagement is much more likely to consist in a statement that the shamed person is evil and that whatever he or she has said is evil. It might look like a smug joke or a sarcastic comment, too. The goal is to get the shamed victim's attention and engagement, which are required if we are really going to change someone. (Campbell, 2023)

As a complex phenomenon, cancel culture can be studied in the context of the processes of digitalization of society or the transformation of historical representations. Within the framework of this article, the key objective is to consider the culture of abolition as one of the mechanisms of symbolic politics that can be used in modern public space to form new identity practices and establish/remove boundaries between communities.

Cancel Culture in the Context of Collective Identity Formation

Within cancel culture, two processes can be observed: division and unification. Division refers to the act of exclusion, where clear boundaries are drawn between groups, while unification involves the development of shared principles within a group. This distinction leads to two categories of definitions: exclusion and consolidation. Exclusion is linked to the desire to punish the target, and the focus is made primarily on the practices directed at them. In contrast, consolidation emphasizes the value of unification to achieve a specific effect, with the focus being made on the group's values and practices. In both cases, the analysis accentuates the functional aspect, where one side dominates, resulting in the diminishing significance of either the excluded or the excluding party. Both processes are closely interconnected—"to separate in order to create,"—where one gives rise to the other. As D. Shar points out,

in its refusal to take sides, its embrace of complexity and nuance, its insistence on neither denying nor centering various categories of identity, and its focus on the

need to work on changing the self and the world at the same time, the integrated perspective truly runs against the grain of our modern political and activist and outrage culture. (Shar, 2024)

However, the logic behind the construction of a “negative identity” is somewhat different, as it involves achieving internal unity in the community by constructing the identity of those who do not belong to that group.

Differentiation is one of the principles of community building. In order to establish interaction or non-interaction, its members are compelled to create symbols and signs that distinguish “us” from “them.” “The depth of such divisions can be assessed by looking at the forms of interaction among social actors—from dialogue to confrontation, conflict, and alienation—and the nature of their reflection in group identities” (Semenenko, 2023; Trans. by D. A. & D. I.). In cancel culture, a key condition for division is depth, specifically a mandatory state of conflict in which dialogue is impossible. The canceled individual may lose their previously acquired titles, be erased from public discourse, have their work discredited, be barred from attending public events, and even face the loss of their freedom. Examples may include boycotts of films made by certain directors or publishers’ refusal to work with certain writers.

However, exclusion is often less about the desire to “get rid” of someone and more about establishing and protecting one’s own boundaries. Interestingly, until the moment of the statement or action that later “provokes” the cancellation, the community not only does not exist but is also unaware of any need for it. The “I do not agree” acknowledgment serves as a turning point and lays the groundwork for forming a new community. This new community establishes its identity by creating negative symbols that are directed at the opposing group. Importantly, “canceling individuals and organizations may not be enough to secure lasting positive change or make the target of canceling change their position at all” (Roldan et al., 2024). The concern lies not only in the objectives of social ostracism but also in the methods it employs in modern collective interactions to gain public support.

Each community will have its own symbolic set; however, each individual member must personally connect or relate those symbols to themselves. For example, the unifying factor behind the canceling of J. K. Rowling, the author of the Harry Potter fantasy series, is support for transgender individuals (Stack, 2019). The author posted several messages on social media stating that she does not support the introduction of new gender designations, which resulted in attempts to cancel her. It is noteworthy that a key aspect of the rise of cancel culture is the manipulation of ethical norms commonly associated with what is known as “new ethics.” According to A. A. Guseynov,

the new ethical perspective emphasizes the inadmissibility of imperial (racist, colonial, sexist) prejudices in the public atmosphere, even in cases of their weak manifestations and isolated incidents. What is new here is that ethics, when expressed on a personal level, becomes truly meaningful and universally significant, avoiding alienation or distortion. As a result, a radical shift happens: the moral perspective on the world moves not from the general to the particular, but from the particular to the general. (Guseynov, 2021; Trans. by D. A. & D. I.)

In a socio-philosophical context, this statement means that the local values of a particular community are imposed on other communities, which inevitably leads to sharp fractures in various segments of the social space.

Without negative qualities, the canceled individual, in and of themselves, is not interesting to future members of the community; however, once these qualities are identified, the canceled gain particular significance, serving as a negative symbol. Interestingly, the image of the victim often takes a backseat. Members subsequently joining the community may not even be fully aware of the situation, yet they become part of it simply because the symbol exists. Quite illustrative in this respect is the case of Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein, who was convicted of rape and numerous instances of harassment. Despite the fact that the accusations came from other prominent individuals, Weinstein's persona carried primary symbolic significance. This has led to a social phenomenon known as the Weinstein Effect, which refers to the widespread accusations of sexual harassment against well-known figures (Stelter, 2017).

The emerging communities generate symbolic support, which includes hashtags on social media, such as the names of social movements (#BlackLivesMatter¹, #MeToo²), calls to action (#RIPJKRowling), and slogans ("Hands up, don't shoot," "No justice, no peace"). Gestures are also prevalent, one of which is the raised fist, symbolizing freedom in relation to the Black community. As A. A. Guseynov (2021) puts it, "cancel culture places a spotlight on issues, such as sexism, racism, and abuse, that may push or encourage people to become informed on the gravity and nuances of the issue itself." It should be noted that each of the above-mentioned movements has its own distinct set of symbols, aimed at consolidating the community and positioning it against those communities that are viewed not just as "others," but as "alien" or "hostile."

The symbolic component becomes crucial in these processes because members of the newly formed group cannot be united by specific internal characteristics. They may differ in physical attributes, cultural experiences, or social statuses. The internal symbols that individuals share are potential rather than mandatory.

A good example in this respect is the cancellation of American actor Johnny Depp, who was accused of domestic violence (Arkin, 2022). In this case, the likelihood of joining the canceling community is highest, first among those who are victims of violence or actively fight for their rights, and second among fans or anti-fans who are immersed in the actor's information landscape and have a certain initial stance towards him. When looking at the community that canceled Johnny Depp, it is clear that it included both fans and critics. This group eventually aligned with the movement #MeToo, which condemns violence and harassment. Thus, those who have some personal experience related to the statement or who have been part of the general information flow surrounding the object of cancellation are most likely to become part of the canceling group. To gain a deeper understanding of the specifics and

¹ <https://blacklivesmatter.com>

² <https://metoomvmt.org>

role of cancel culture in social spaces, we are going to turn to P. Bourdieu's concept of symbolic politics.

The Structure of Symbolic Space and the Mechanisms of Social Exclusion

Considering social space as a “multidimensional space, an open set of fields that are relatively autonomous” (Bourdieu, 1985), we can also speak of an inherent fragmentation within this space. While earlier we referred to differentiation that forms groups, here we mean the heterogeneity of the social fabric. Fields with their unique properties will influence the formation of communities. Importantly, “fields have a history and only have meaning in the framework of differentiated societies. Hence there are societies ‘without fields’ (just as there are societies ‘without a State’, ‘without writing’, ‘without schools’, etc.)” (Hilgers & Mangez, 2015). Cancel culture has become a mechanism that transforms the structure of social fields, creating new positions and relationships between them. This transformation is supported by the high degree of differentiation in contemporary social spaces.

To begin with, let us examine the existing positions in the context of cancel culture. In his exploration of the field of literature, P. Bourdieu explains that each position is objectively determined by a system of significant properties. These properties define how each position relates to others within the overall structure of property distribution (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013). The agent's behavior is dependent on the position they hold. At first glance, it may seem that cancel culture involves only the relationship between two positions, namely the “cancelers” and the “canceled.” However, reducing it to these two basic elements limits our understanding of the system of relationships and the mechanism itself, failing to provide a complete picture. Instead, four positions can be identified: the “canceled,” the “cancelers–initiators,” the “cancelers–executors,” and the “authorities.”

The first position to be considered is that of the “canceled.” As previously mentioned, this refers to the individual or group through whom a new community of the canceled is formed by exclusion. However, not every actor can serve as a negative symbol capable of becoming a focal point around which the community's identity can be built. It is important that the canceled should possess a certain amount of symbolic capital. Otherwise, building relationships is not worthwhile, as there is no resource to invest in. Once outside the community, the canceled individual is partially or completely deprived of their capital. The actor's reputation sharply declines, and they cease to be an active participant in virtual space, as any of their posts are subjected to “complaints,” negative comments, and restrictions on basic electronic transactions, including payments and others. The most extreme form of such cancellation can be the blocking of an account. In the modern world, this can be compared to the “murder” of this person, as profiles and their management on social networks have gained such high value that they are comparable to an equivalent of human life, often experienced more fully than in reality. Restrictions also apply to physical space. The actor may face bans on visiting certain locations, or information about their whereabouts may be disclosed, creating a threat to their safety. In this position, people are often forced

to suspend their online channels and leave the virtual world for a while, as they lose capital and can no longer use their previous means of influence.

Cancelers are the most complex element to understand, as they comprise two communities: cancelers–initiators and cancelers–executors. In their eyes, the system of views and beliefs of the canceled individual (either personally or as a representative of a specific community) poses a threat to social reality and requires unification to eliminate it. The shared motives and collaborative efforts of the cancelers–initiators and cancelers–executors can sometimes provide a reason for their unity; however, there are still notable differences between their positions.

An important point to clarify is how to define “cancelers–executors.” These are Internet users who are the first to express dissent in the public space. They are the ones who post comments, give dislikes, and create groups on social media to condemn statements that contradict their moral foundations, which ultimately becomes the basis for social organization. This group will include fans and anti-fans who have shared similar life experiences, as well as those who, for various reasons (professional, social, etc.), are included in a common living space. This group tends to be the most spontaneous, minimally controlled, and unstable, as it emerges in response to circumstances and can transition to a new qualitative level in exceptional situations.

To ensure their existence as a community, cancelers–executors need to strengthen their position by assigning a negative value to the actor and stripping them of social support—capital. The group’s independent strength, amplified through virtualization, has limitations when it comes to canceling the actor. A solution may be to attract the capital of other communities that are interested in participating. For instance, the resources of the #MeToo movement were actively involved in the cancellation of Johnny Depp. He lost the opportunity to express himself professionally, temporarily losing advertising contacts and film offers. In some cases, we can speak of an autonomous struggle for capital that does not involve a third party, where a transition to a new qualitative level occurs through the independent strengthening of the group via institutionalization. The community gets hold of capital, gaining its own place and goals in the social space. Returning to #MeToo, it should be noted that its emergence is linked to a shift in the status of existing capitals, which underpinned the movement’s creation. However, this situation is a rare exception rather than the rule. This is related, first, to the complex organization of the process, and second, to the need for ethically-oriented groups to carve out their own space in a competitive environment, even when their views are similar. This suggests that attracting resources from a third party will be the most accessible way for the canceling group.

The cancelers–initiators can be understood as institutionally established communities that possess a well-defined symbolic capital, as well as a set of social practices that exist and are repeatedly applied to maintain identity. These are the groups that will hold the power to cancel. The lack of sufficient capital prevents the cancelers from implementing their decisions. To do this, they require an additional community that possesses the necessary resources. These include public organizations aimed at protecting certain segments of the population, addressing urgent social problems, and preserving the memory of events of collective value. It is their capital that will be used

not only in the act of canceling but also in constructing the community of cancelers. In this case, the point of the matter lies not in uniting communities, but in attracting additional strength.

These groups are associated with a specific value vector that characterizes them in social space (e.g., the movement Black Lives Matter condemns racism and violence against Black individuals, while #MeToo condemns violence and sexual harassment). If we take a closer look at the relationship structure, we will see that the community of cancelers–executors invests capital into the community of cancelers–initiators. In this case, it would not be right to speak of their complete unification, but rather of a beneficial exchange, where the former sustain their viability through investment, while the latter create opportunities for their own existence through attraction. It may seem that the cancelers–executors do not need intermediaries, as their capital allows them to act directly. However, the community of the canceled provides them with strength by increasing their “social capital” and offers essential quantitative support, reducing the need to constantly search for potential individuals that could be canceled.

“Authorities” make up the fourth position and include those who hold the formal rights to cancel. While earlier changes were related to symbolic manifestations, here they imply real sanctions. Within this position, the executing actors have the power to use force. These actions affect both symbolic and physical spaces, consisting of specific punishments such as fines and arrests, for instance, Harvey Weinstein’s prison sentence and John Lasseter’s dismissal (Lee, 2017). It is to the “authorities” that the cancelers–executors appeal, seeking to enforce public punishment that is approved not only by society but also formally by law, thereby securing a final victory and reinforcing their capital. In addition to the state, which holds the greatest amount of power, it is important to note other executors such as publishing houses, film companies, festival organizers, and so on. Even though the position of “authorities” is a strong position in cancel culture, it is also the most formal and simultaneously the most dependent: the state relies on communities that create a risk of instability, while other organizations depend on the potential for loss. Both elements have to adjust in order to maintain their position.

A significant advantage for the executors is the strategy that benefits the cancelers–executors. Bourdieu posits that the whole range of symbolic strategies can be fitted between two extremes: insult and symbolic imposition. The executors most often operate at the level of insults, sending messages or posting negative content. The cancelers–executors will have access to

an act of symbolic imposition that has behind it all the strength of the collective, the consensus, the common sense, because it is performed by a delegated agent of the State, the holder of the monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence. (Bourdieu, 1985)

Thus, the diversity of communities and their inherent value orientations generate a natural need to establish influence, which inevitably leads to conflict. Capital serves as a tool for strengthening power or manipulating society to achieve one’s goals.

By striving to establish their own ethical rules in the social sphere, groups seek to achieve a dominant position. This dominance is understood as the concentration of the largest share of capital in the hands of the community compared to others or the predominance of capital that is most valuable in a particular field. This enables the group to establish control over a specific resource and alter the value of each one. As a result, the main goal of communities is to acquire the necessary capital, which leads to the differentiation of both social and symbolic spaces. A key feature of this differentiation is the division between a symbolic center and a symbolic periphery (Zevako, 2023).

Pierre Bourdieu, who most often identifies three types of capital—economic, cultural, and symbolic—notes that different types of capital, like trump cards in a game, represent power that determines the chances of winning in a given field. The struggle, in which each community aims to create its own vision of the world, requires active efforts focused on acquiring and securing certain forms of capital (Zevako, 2023). Communication channels will play a significant role in this symbolic appropriation, enabling the reproduction and reinforcement of a specific image of both the present and the past, as can be seen in the example of the memory of the Soviet Union (Ivanov, 2024). For cancel culture, the most advantageous form is symbolic representation, as the actions of various positions are primarily linked to reputation, the representation of individuals or groups, and the play of meanings. Cultural and economic capital are secondary to symbolic capital, as they complement it and provide certain advantages to their holders. Cancel culture, defined as the act of stripping capital from one group while enhancing it for the cancelers—initiators and cancelers—executors, is exemplified by the Golden Globes scandal, where several celebrities refused to attend the ceremony because there were no Black members on the jury (Lee, 2021). The reference to the past experiences of competing communities is particularly important for legitimizing the existing redistribution of capital. This is evident both at the international level (e.g., attempts to redistribute symbolic capital for victory in World War II) and at the local level, where fragmented places of memory serve as vivid testimonies to the struggle for a significant past (Golovashina, 2022).

This case also illustrates how the dominant community is capable of altering the value of capital. The rise of cancel culture has led to shifts in how capital's significance is distributed across different fields. Recalling another film award, we can trace the transformation in the value of capital positions. While a couple of decades ago, a director focused primarily on thematic elements when making a film, starting in 2024, the rules for winning the Academy Award have been rewritten. One of the new criteria now is that “at least 30% of all actors not submitted for consideration are from at least two underrepresented groups which may include: Women, Racial or ethnic group, LGBTQ+³, People with cognitive or physical disabilities, or who are deaf or hard of hearing” (Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, n.d.), which indicates a transformation in the understanding of cultural capital itself and its significance for

³ The international LGBT public movement is recognized as an extremist organization, with its activities banned on the territory of the Russian Federation. Международное общественное движение ЛГБТ признано в России экстремистской организацией, чья деятельность запрещена на территории РФ.

positions. This change is becoming a standard for both the film industry and other fields, including literature, science, and more.

When discussing the struggle for capital, it is important to understand that despite the involvement of all positions, the primary participants in the clash of cancel culture will be the canceled and the cancelers—executors, due to the clearer value boundaries they establish. The formation of a community based on negative identity can lead to a backlash effect, where the exclusion of the “other” prompts the emergence of a new group. In response to the emergence of the canceling community, a community of the canceled emerges. For example, the attempt to exclude Johnny Depp and J. K. Rowling from social space resulted in the formation of a community of the canceled: in social media, hashtags such as #JusticeForJohnnyDepp and #IStandWithJKRowling have started to spread widely as symbols of the emergence and strengthening of such a community. The latter is built not as an initial supporter of certain values, but as a reaction to the awareness of their prohibition, an attempt to eliminate the dominance of these values in the social space. As the community of the canceled is constructed, it becomes an active and legitimate player in the struggle. Its capital growth poses a direct threat to the cancelers, endangering their very existence. Losing the support of the cancelers—executors, the canceling community is bound to fall apart.

Virtualization of Symbolic Space: Social and Political Significance

Having identified the positions and relationships between them, we need to consider the place of their action and implementation. According to Bourdieu, there are two types of space: physical and social. “Just as a physical space is defined by the mutual externality of parts, social space is defined by the mutual exclusion (or distinction) of positions which constitute it, that is, as a structure of juxtaposition of social positions” (Bourdieu, 1998). Physical space becomes literally connected to the structure of the city, while social space is linked to an abstract understanding shaped by fields. Virtualization creates yet another space that functions as a social construct, where relationships between social positions are formed. This space will be primary for both the cancelers and the canceled.

It would be more appropriate to talk about the correlation between physical and virtual spaces, within which the social, with its inherent positions, is realized. Virtuality in this case creates specific conditions and new tools for action. In the context of cancel culture, the construction and existence of communities relies on the hashtag method, which is based on spreading a statement or call to action on social media with the help of a specific symbol. Often, moral categories such as justice, peace, and others are initially embedded in it. Likes, reposts, hashtags, and other forms of capital competition can create a multimillion community within a few hours. In this case, physical space is a secondary site of realization, where the actions of the canceling community can be observed. In the context of cancel culture, it is impossible to unify positions according to where people live, including neighborhoods, streets, and other geographic factors. However, the apparent spatial chaos of physical and virtual spaces does not negate the symbolic places that confirm the existence of communities.

“Appropriated space is one of the sites where power is asserted and wielded, and no doubt under the most invisible form, that of symbolic violence as unperceived violence,” Bourdieu (2018) writes. The presence of such places indicates the success and establishment of a community within social reality. In physical space, which can be seen as a “projection of social space” (Bourdieu, 1998), the transformation of sites of memory stands out as significant. In this case, a common practice for affirming a community is the demolition or installation of monuments. In 2020, members of the Black Lives Matter movement destroyed and threw into the water the statue of British businessman Edward Colston, who built his business on the slave trade (Sullivan, 2020). The previously uncontroversial fact has now become a means of strengthening a new community, not just through destruction, but as part of a full-fledged ritualistic act. The justification in the physical space of the #MeToo movement was, on the contrary, the erection of a monument not in the form of a specific person, but rather a snarling burgundy puma (Campano, 2019).

Virtual space, operating outside the realm of physical objects, also has symbolic places for the community. The most obvious example is the creation of groups on social media, where participants state their goals and post relevant news, while victims share their stories. These communities even have their own geographic location in the virtual space in the form of IDs. However, the most interesting place is the account of the one being canceled. It acquires special significance during the cancellation process, becoming associated with the symbol of negative identity. The personal page on social media is targeted by the attacks of cancelers in the form of comments, negative ratings, and so on. The ability to deform social space becomes an indicator of success, which can be measured in the physical realm, through the demolition and creation of monuments, while in the virtual realm, it manifests as the takeover of a profile, denial of access to it, or attempts to establish complete control over the actions or statements of its owner.

Cancel culture functions as a mechanism in social reality that, on the one hand, highlights the emergence of new positions and power dynamics. On the other hand, it drives social transformation, resulting in both positive and negative consequences. The desire to help oppressed social groups sometimes leads to the use of aggressive tactics to assert certain positions, which not only fail to solve the problems but actually make them worse. Preservation of a community’s identity becomes dangerous for all participants involved in the process. The negative consequences manifest on two levels: collective and individual. On the collective level, an aggressive approach to boundary-setting turns divisions into deep societal rifts. I. S. Semenenko argues that “divisions and fractures indicate the processes of the social fabric’s breakdown and its transition to a new state” (Semenenko, 2023; Trans. by D. A. & D. I.). However, in the case of cancel culture, they lead not to qualitative changes but to endless processes of separation, where the speed of transitioning from one position to another increases, and the manipulation of ethical categories grows, creating tension in the social space. This situation results in pseudo-solidarity, providing a temporary illusion of unity, in which the aggressive nature of methods used becomes very real and dangerous.

The attempts to cancel J. K. Rowling reached a point where those calling for her cancellation launched the hashtag #RIPJKRowling, which literally implies a metaphor of the person's assassination. The situation escalated to the point where exclusion manifested not only on a social level but also on a physical one: the writer's address was leaked online, and she began receiving death threats (Stolworthy, 2021). This example illustrates the personal level, where an individual is stripped of their fundamental sense of safety. The rapid shifts in social dynamics mean that anyone could suddenly find themselves among the canceled, with the tools that appear to offer protection out of their reach. As a result, someone may unknowingly find themselves excluded from the community. This uncertainty forces people to navigate a delicate balance—either suppressing their own values and offering insincere apologies to maintain solidarity, or standing firm and risking social exclusion. Those who hold different views are faced with a difficult choice: either confront and defend their beliefs, risking being canceled, or conform and risk compromising their own integrity.

Conclusion

The increasing role of virtual elements in the quest for symbolic capital significantly impacts both social and political processes. In today's public space, the development of international relations is also influenced by virtual communications that contribute to the formation and maintenance of negative identities. An important task in studying these processes in the context of Pierre Bourdieu's symbolic analysis is to examine both the content of public boycotting practices and identify the actors interested in reconfiguring social space through canceling methods.

It is worth noting that the prospects for studying cancel culture as an element in the formation and transformation of collective identities highlight the duality of the process of negative identification. On the one hand, the construction of negative symbols helps consolidate the canceling community. However, paradoxically, the increasing number of cancellation criteria contributes not to the fragmentation but to the consolidation of the canceled community. To be more precise, individuals appropriate imposed symbols, recode them, and then use them as the foundation for a new identity. This new identity may have been completely absent or only in its early stages when the canceling process began. The gradual weakening of the symbolic resource of the canceling community, which blurs the boundaries between perpetrators and victims, also contributes to the intensification of these processes, leading to the construction of fundamentally different contours of the symbolic space.

In a well-known parable from the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus likens the Kingdom of God to a vineyard, emphasizing through the phrase "the last shall be first" that there are no barriers—whether age, nationality, or social status—to embracing piety. However, in contemporary social reality, this phrase takes on an entirely different meaning, reflecting the dialectic of identity formation, where no position in the symbolic space can be permanently assigned to a particular community. Canceling turns out to be a double-edged sword, not only helping to restore justice but also creating new communities of the offended who seek symbolic redemption.

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