

## Dismantling Bias Conference Series

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### The Role of Organizations in Employees' Commitment to Addressing Racism

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## **The Role of Organizations in Employees' Commitment to Addressing Racism**

An ally is a person who belongs to “advantaged groups engaging in committed action to improve the treatment and status of a disadvantaged group” (Louis et al., 2019, p. 6). Extant research on allies has focused on ally identity development (e.g., Broido, 2000; Edwards, 2006), antecedents to ally behaviors (Duhigg et al., 2010; Iyer & Ryan, 2009), and outcomes of ally behaviors (Dickter et al., 2011; Droogendyk et al., 2016). However, very little scholarship has considered allyship, or *how* allies can be most effective (see Sabat et al., 2015). Given that the racial reckoning of 2020 illuminated the need for racially advantaged groups (i.e., White employees) to be effective allies to members of racially marginalized groups, in the current work, we examine race-related allyship. Specifically, we examine how organizations can be effective at harnessing race-related allyship in their racially advantaged (i.e., White) employees. To do so, we used the events of 2020 (e.g., the Black Lives Matter movement, and related protests) to measure organizations' communication (or lack thereof) about the race-related events of 2020. Specifically, we contend that organizations' communication about the racial justice will relate to White employees' commitment to address racism inside and outside of the workplace.

To elaborate, we suggest that when White allies perceive their organizations as sincere in their race-related communication -relative to organizations that provide no communication, or those whose communication is *not* anti-racist- this will mediate the relationship between organizations' communication and White allies' commitment to addressing racism. To examine if this research model is a general phenomenon, or a way to harness the allyship behavior of racially advantaged employees, we examine the same relationships in Black employees, as well.

We test our model with data collected from 637 US employees (49.9 % female;  $M_{\text{age}} = 49.63$ ,  $SD = 13.59$ ; 327 White and 254 Black employees) and gather two waves of data across 4-

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months (starting February 2020), with a mixed-methods approach (quantitative and qualitative data). First, we analyzed the content of organizational statements about racial justice based on the level of antiracism exhibited (0 = No statement [66%]; 1=An Exclusionary Institution [1.7%] – 6=Fully Inclusive Anti-Racism Multicultural Organization [.3%]; Jackson & Hardiman, 2006). Second, using the PROCESS for SPSS, we found that White allies' perceptions of their organization's sincerity about anti-racist efforts mediated the relationship between the level of antiracism in an organizations' communication about racial justice and White employees' commitment to addressing racism.

Note that we examined two organizational motivations: internally motivated (e.g., My organization feels morally obligated to help Blacks) and externally-motivated (e.g., My organization wants their stakeholders to think positively about how they handled recent discussions of race) attributions. Both types of motivations harnessed commitment to addressing racism for White employees, as organizations' communication about racial justice significantly predicted each mediator, and then both types of motivation related significantly to commitment to address racism inside (internally motivated:  $b = .45, p < .001$ ; externally motivated:  $b = .22, p < .001$ ), and outside (internally motivated:  $b = .44, p < .001$ ; externally motivated:  $b = .15, p = .02$ ), of work. That is, when White employees perceived their organizations to be sincere (i.e., 'talking the talk' about racial justice relating to perceptions of organizations 'walking the walk' through internally motivated, and externally-motivated, attributions), they were more committed to addressing racism inside *and* outside of work.

For Black employees, internally and externally motivated attributions mediated the organizational communication-addressing racism relationships significantly, but only for the commitment to address racism inside (internally-motivated:  $b = .16, p = .005$ ; externally-

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motivated:  $b = .18$ ,  $p = .002$ ), but not outside (internally-motivated:  $b = .09$ ,  $p = .12$ ; externally-motivated:  $b = .09$ ,  $p = .09$ ), of work. In supplemental analyses, we found that organizational communication did relate significantly to increased psychological well-being, psychological availability, and decreased stress and burnout for Black employees, meaning that organizational communication about racial justice related to employees' perception of their sincerity in doing so for both White and Black employees and this related to addressing racism in the workplace for both White and Black employees, addressing racism outside of the workplace for White allies, and for the psychological well-being of Black employees at work.

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