

Dismantling Bias Conference Series

Understanding allyship at work: An investigation of the antecedents of allyship behavior toward marginalized employees

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Understanding allyship at work:

An investigation of the antecedents of allyship behavior toward marginalized employees

Allies play an integral role in the reduction of microaggressions, prejudices, and discrimination (Salter & Migliaccio, 2019; Sue et al., 2019). However, the workplace arena presents situations that make it difficult for allies to act authentically on their desire to amplify egalitarian ideals. For this reason, it is important to better understand what constitutes allyship behavior, and why some individuals are more (or less) likely to become an ally for marginalized employees. To begin answering these important and timely questions, we began the process of conducting a series of three empirical studies.

Study 1: Development and Validation of the ABME Scale

Despite acknowledged variance across samples and contexts (Salter & Migliaccio, 2019), scholars have historically measured allyship behaviors using unidimensional scales (e.g., Gates et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2019). Without a comprehensive multidimensional measure, empirical research on allyship at work is limited. As such, we propose a new measure of allyship behavior toward marginalized employees (ABME), which we conceptualize as behaviors aimed at confronting and rectifying injustice and providing advocacy, recognition and acknowledgment, learning and growth, support, voice, and mentorship to marginalized employees. In conceptualizing, measuring, and validating the ABME scale, we address several gaps in the literature (e.g., Cheng et al., 2019; Madsen et al., 2020).

We rely on our conceptualization of ABME and existing measures (e.g., allyship, voice/participation, collective action, identity courage; Ashburn-Nardo, 2018; Cheng et al., 2019; Koerner, 2014; Liang et al., 2012; Madsen et al., 2020; Sherf et al., 2017; Subašić et al., 2018; Thoroughgood et al., 2021) to generate an initial pool of 122 items. Four authors independently

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developed items reflecting each proposed subdimension (see Table 1 for a list of all dimensions and a subsample of scale items). All items were screened for simplicity, conceptual convergence, double-barreled phrasing, and redundancy, resulting in 84 unique and relevant items.

In Study 1a, the 84 items will undergo a Q-sort process (Anderson & Gerbing, 1991) using a sample of 100 adult employees working full-time. Employees will be recruited via Prolific (e.g., Carnevale et al., 2021; Gladstone et al., 2021). We will show participants definitions for each of the eight allyship dimensions, and participants will match items with their most appropriate definition by dragging the item into the corresponding definitional box. Items of poor fit can be dragged to a “*Item does not fit any category*” box. We will use the proportion of substantive agreement (p_{sa}) and substantive-validity coefficient (c_{sv}) to establish substantive validity. Items not meeting our p_{sa} ($p_{sa} < 1.00 - 0.11 = .89$) and c_{sv} ($c_{sv} < .55$; Howard & Melloy, 2016) cutoff values will be omitted. In Study 1b, we will evaluate the factor structure of the retained ABME items to determine if additional reductions are warranted. Finally, in Study 1c, we will re-examine the psychometric properties of the ABME scale and assess its overlap with (convergent validity) and distinctiveness from (discriminant validity) nomologically-related constructs (e.g., allyship, voice/participation, equity, collective action, identity courage).

Study 2 and Study 3: Antecedents of ABME

In response to calls for research that examine “what prompts allyship behavior” (Patton & Bondi, 2015; Radke et al., 2020), the final set of studies seeks to examine antecedents of ABME. Prior scholarship positions allyship behavior as the outcome of ‘white guilt’ (Case, 2012; Grzanka et al., 2015; Spanierman & Heppner, 2004). However, allyship behavior extends beyond privilege and guilt and, instead, is likely the result of the complex interplay of multiple moving elements, including the ally’s demographics (i.e., gender, race, status in organizations),

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individual differences (e.g., personality, generalized self-esteem, locus of control), and personal competencies (i.e., generalized self-efficacy, emotional regulation), as well as group-specific (i.e., group (dis)similarity and composition, status dynamics) and event-level contingencies (i.e., novelty, disruptiveness, criticality, origin, spatial dynamics, timing, and duration of the event initiating possible allyship). As such, using an event-oriented approach (i.e., events system theory; Morgeson et al., 2015), Study 2 will consider demographic, individual difference, and competency-based instigators of allyship behavior using time-separate data from full-time employees. Study 3 extends the previous study by also focusing on the group- and event-specific characteristics that shape daily allyship behaviors at work using an experience sampling methodology on 150 full-time employees. As part of Study 3, we will request short-answer qualitative responses aimed at capturing employees' perceived reasons for daily ABME (or lack thereof). Although scholars have examined allyship qualitatively and in laboratory settings (e.g., Brooks & Edwards, 2009; Johnson et al., 2019; Sumerau et al., 2021), our mixed-methods, multi-study approach will add clarity to the nuances of ABME.

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Table 1
ABME Dimensional Definitions and Sample Items

Scale Items
<p><i>Confrontation</i> – publicly confronting instances of unfairness toward marginalized employees</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. opposes policies and practices that disadvantage marginalized employees 2. confronts situations of unfairness and disrespect toward marginalized employees 3. calls out bullying and harassing behaviors toward marginalized employees
<p><i>Rectification</i> – redressing and correcting inappropriate and errored actions against marginalized employees</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. tries to rectify work practices that are discriminatory towards marginalized employees 2. correct others when they make inaccurate or prejudicial comments towards marginalized employees 3. takes on significant risk (e.g., adverse career consequences, reputational harm, retaliation) to correct unfairness toward marginalized employees
<p><i>Advocacy</i> – outwardly displaying support for and recommendation of marginalized employees</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. openly supports equal employment policies and practices 2. advocates for diversity, equity, and inclusion in the organization’s business strategy 3. recommends marginalized employees for promotion to higher positions
<p><i>Recognition and acknowledgment</i> – recognizing and acknowledging the accomplishments, skills, and efforts of marginalized employees</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. acknowledges the contributions of marginalized employees 2. recognizes that marginalized employees offer unique and valuable perspectives 3. recognizes the strengths and efforts of marginalized employees
<p><i>Learning and growth</i> – encouraging knowledge acquisition, personal growth, and training and development for self and others on marginalized employee issues</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. educates oneself on marginalized employee issues 2. teaches others how to discern and respond to remarks that put marginalized employees in disadvantage 3. proactively educates oneself about diversity, equity, and inclusion issues at work
<p><i>Socio-emotional support</i> – providing social and emotional support for marginalized employees in the workplace</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. is a person who marginalized employees trust when they experience unfairness at work 2. provides empathy and compassion for marginalized employees 3. provides a ‘listening ear’ to marginalized employees
<p><i>Voice</i> – encouraging marginalized employees’ voice and involvement in decision making at work</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. invites marginalized employees to share their stories/experiences 2. makes sure marginalized employees have opportunities to share ideas and opinions 3. actively supports the voices of marginalized employees
<p><i>Mentorship</i> – providing guidance, assistance, direction, and visibility to marginalized employees in the workplace</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. encourages formal education and learning for marginalized employees 2. helps marginalized employees with career planning 3. provides feedback and guidance to marginalized employees

Note. This table only provides a subsample of each dimension’s items. The full 84 items, which will undergo scale validation, are available from the first author upon request.