When Do Disadvantaged Group Members Identify Organizational Allies? The Role of Social Identity Threat

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It is becoming more commonplace for organizations to support diversity and enforce policies or initiatives to improve diversity. While organizations have channeled their efforts into diversity initiatives (Ely and Thomas, 2001), we aim to focus on the actions that disadvantaged group members (i.e. groups that currently experience unjust or discriminatory treatment) may take to address inclusion and belonging concerns they may have.

One way to address concerns about inclusion within organization is by focusing on allyship. More specifically, disadvantaged group members can cope with inclusion concerns in organizations by identifying organizations allies (i.e., people who are inclined to take action to address the injustice experiences by a member of a disadvantaged group). Recent research on allyship has focused on understanding how the presence of allies can improve the experiences of disadvantaged group members. For example, Johnson and Pietri (2020) found that when someone self-identifies as an ally or is endorsed as an ally by a respected other, the presence of that perceived ally resulted in increased anticipated trust and belonging among Black women who contemplated joining a STEM workplace (see also Pietri et al., 2018). However, within organizations, another person's status as an ally (or not) is less likely to be directly conveyed to disadvantaged group members. Thus, while it is helpful to know that the presence of allies brings benefits to disadvantaged group members, it is also important to ask: how and when do disadvantaged group members seek to identify allies *for themselves* to cope with inclusion concerns?

In particular, we integrate social identity threat (Steel & Aronson, 1995) and uncertainty management theory (Lind & Van den Bos, 2002) to examine how disadvantaged group members utilize allies as a strategy to cope with inclusion concerns within organizations. We argue that, when disadvantaged group members experience social identity threat, they are motivated to

protect themselves from potential harm, and one way they do so is by seeking out allies. We argue that disadvantaged group members attempt to protect their identity because they aim to reduce the uncertainty created by social identity threat. We further argue that when allies are identified, disadvantaged group members experience greater procedural justice and belonging.

To test these ideas, we begin by seeking evidence of whether disadvantaged group members react to social identity threats in their environment by paying closer attention to cues that might signal others' statuses as allies or non-allies (Study 1). Then, we focus on procedural justice and sense of belonging to observe the impact of identifying an organizational ally (Study 2).

In our first study, we find that social identity threat (relative to control) increased the prioritization of ally-related signals, indicating a positive effect of social identity threat on ally identification. Moreover, personal uncertainty mediated the indirect effect of social identity threat on ally identification. Overall, the first study provides preliminary evidence that social identity threat, and the feelings of personal uncertainty that accompany it, motivate members of disadvantaged groups to seek out information to identify allies. The second study determines disadvantaged group members' reactions to allies' behaviors. We observe that identifying an ally leads to higher procedural justice in comparison to not identifying an ally. Additionally, greater procedural justice explains the relationship between identifying an ally and greater sense of belonging. However, the central limitation of these studies is that they focused on a hypothetical situation, asking participants to imagine how they would feel. Therefore, we are currently conducting a field study to test these ideas among employees at various organizations to observe their reactions to allies in the workplace.

The present work seeks to make two key contributions. First, we aim to contribute to the allyship literature by explaining the role of ally identification in helping disadvantaged group members to cope with the uncertainty created by instances of social identity threat. Second, we contribute to research focusing on how individuals react to social identity threat by foregrounding the agency of disadvantaged group members in overcoming feelings of exclusion. Specifically, much of the extant work on inclusion focuses on how organizations can intervene to improve the sense of belonging and inclusion experienced by disadvantaged group members. By focusing on how disadvantaged group members seek out and respond to allies, we bring the agency of traditionally marginalized people into a more central position in the scholarly conversation.