

Dismantling Bias Conference Series

The Missing Middle: Asian Employees' Experience of Workplace Discrimination and Pro-Black Workplace Allyship

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Abstract

Asian employees occupy an intermediate status in the U.S. racial hierarchy between White and Black employees. Given this intermediate position, it is unclear whether and how Asian employees' own racial experience at work will affect their willingness to take action against racism toward other groups. In the current research, we examine how Asian employees' experiences of racism impact their propensity to combat racism against Black coworkers. We ground theorizing in the Common Ingroup Identity Model, Realistic Group Conflict Theory, and the emerging literature on allyship.

Across four studies, including a qualitative survey (Pilot), a time-lagged quantitative survey (Study 1) a pre-registered experiment (Study 2), and a conceptual replication experiment (Study 3), we find that Asian employees who experience more racial discrimination at work feel more similar to Black individuals, which is subsequently associated with greater allyship toward Black co-workers. We find that this relationship is heightened among Asian employees who have stronger zero-sum beliefs (Study 1). Importantly, we further find that processes that lead to allyship among Asian employees differ among White employees (Studies 2-3): In contrast to Asian employees, White employees who perceive more anti-ingroup workplace discrimination feel *less* similar to Black individuals, which is associated with diminished pro-Black allyship. Finally, in a study examining how Black employees perceive allies (Study 4), we find that Black employees do not differ in their attitudes toward, and perceptions of effectiveness and standing of, Asian versus White allies.

The current work expands the conception of race relations as being composed of more than two groups by examining the dynamics between Asian, Black, and White employees. Our work also highlights Asian employees as potential allies to other racial minority employees, contrasting with the common depiction of allies as members of the most dominant group (e.g., Whites and men). In doing so, we uncover perceived similarity and zero-sum beliefs as novel antecedents to allyship. By examining the poorly understood racial experiences of Asian employees, and by uncovering mechanisms that propel Asian employees to engage in intergroup allyship, we provide a more complete picture of racism in the workplace.