

Dismantling Bias Conference Series

What's in it for men to be allies to women? Examining interpersonal and institutional pressure in driving men's self-interest in allyship

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What's in it for men to be allies to women?

Examining interpersonal and institutional pressure in driving men's self-interest in allyship

Over the last five years, men – as leaders and colleagues - have been increasingly called upon to step up as allies to women in pursuit of gender equality in organizations (e.g., United Nations HeforShe Campaign, #LeanInTogether led by the Sheryl Sandberg & Dave Goldberg Family Foundation). While past calls for engagement in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts have primarily appealed to organizations' interests (i.e., business case) or social responsibility/moral imperative (i.e., moral case), these do not adequately speak to individual men. To realize gender equality in the workplace, change efforts ought to encourage lay men to recognize their self-interest (understanding of personal cost and benefits; Bolino & Grant, 2015; Darke & Chaiken, 2005; Edwards, 2006) in the issue. Across three studies, we aim to understand how the increasing demand for DEI in the workplace impacts male employees' perceived self-interest in gender equality efforts, how it may be leveraged to enhance their allyship, and the consequences of this approach.

The Current Studies

To begin with, we anticipated that the heightened social consciousness around DEI in North America would impact male employees' work life. In Study 1, we surveyed 411 male employees (50% in leadership roles) from the US and 475 male employees (28% in leadership roles) from Canada with diverse demographic backgrounds (i.e., age, education level, ethnicity, and industry). We found that male employees feeling like a fake around social justice issues (i.e., impostorism) predicted greater struggles in both samples ($r = .47, .37$) and greater worries ($r = .40$) in the US sample. We anticipated that this impostorism may have two possible causes –

institutional pressure and interpersonal/social pressure to be proficient in DEI. Next, we test these two explanations to examine whether these forms of pressure and, in turn, men's self-interest can be capitalized to promote their allyship.

In Study 2 (*data collection*), we examine 1) whether framing a gender initiative as pertinent to self-interest leads to more support from men compared to framing the initiative as beneficial to others only, and 2) whether self-interest motivated by interpersonal pressure (i.e., DEI pressure from subordinates) vs. institutional pressure (i.e., organizational policies and guidelines) leads to greater support for a gender initiative. We employ an experimental design to compare the effect of interpersonal pressure and institutional pressure on men's support (attitudes and behavioral intentions) for developmental opportunities related to gender diversity management. We hypothesize that gender initiatives framed as related to self-interest will lead to more support from men than not. Furthermore, self-interest motivated by interpersonal pressure will be more effective than that motivated by institutional pressure because interpersonal relationships with colleagues are likely to be experienced as more proximal and self-relevant than top-down institutional guidelines (Warren et al., 2021).

In Study 3 (*planning*), we seek to understand how these different pathways for allyship (i.e., interpersonal vs. institutional pressure) influence allyship outcomes in organizations. Simply, based on the perceived motivation of their leader (self-interest motivated by interpersonal pressure vs. self-interest motivated by institutional pressure vs. moral reasoning/fairness), would women have more faith and belief in their leader's ability to promote gender equality or not? We examine whether women's perceived effectiveness of leaders' allyship (encompassing diversity, equity, and inclusion) change as a function of perceived leaders' motivation. We hypothesize that women's perceived effectiveness will be the strongest when a leader's effort is driven by moral

reasoning/fairness because it signals authenticity (mediator). However, since the literature on this topic is limited, our test of whether women would perceive leader motivation driven by interpersonal pressure will be lower or higher than institutional pressure is largely exploratory and we do not have a priori hypothesis around this.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Across three studies, we explore, in today's climate, how men's experience at work is impacted and how such change may be leveraged to promote gender equality in the workplace. Our research has several implications. First, we urge a paradigm shift from focusing on mitigating gender biases that affect women and direct attention to emphasizing the positive changes that can be brought by eliciting male allyship in the workplace. Second, we challenge the often non-beneficiary role that is assumed for allies in social science research. By highlighting self-interest, we provide a novel lens to conceptualize and promote gender equality in management and psychology research. Third, our research findings urge organizations to understand how the changing landscape of management relates to men's organizational life and to design gender initiatives that highlight their needs to render more support from them.

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