

Dismantling Bias Conference Series

Allyship and Incivility

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For context, I'll be submitting for the special call for allyship below:

<https://www.journals.elsevier.com/organizational-behavior-and-human-decision-processes/call-for-papers/special-issue-allyship-advocacy>

In the workplace, allyship broadly refers to structurally advantaged (Veer et al., 2021) employee's supporting marginalized employees like women and minorities (Burke, 2018, Erskine and Bilimoria, 2019, Harvard Business Review, 2020, Nixon, 2019) and intervening to disrupt microaggressions (Williams & Sharif, 2021). Some also argue that allies must exhibit this support by forfeiting their privilege (Spanierman & Smith, 2017). Examples include breaking with white solidarity (DiAngelo, 2018, 2021), the unspoken agreement among whites to avoid racial issues that may make another white person uncomfortable (Sleeter, 1996).

Aspiring allies find themselves in a difficult position. Upon witnessing microaggressions, first they must recognize the need to intervene (Ashburn-Nardo et al, 2008) and choose to do so in a timely manner. Many are reluctant to do so due to awkwardness or lack of skill (Hebl et al, 2000). These microaggressions are a form of workplace incivility, or low-intensity, deviant behavior with the ambiguous intent to harm (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Workplace incivility has been framed as a form of modern discrimination (Cortina 2008, 2013) which can conceal racism and sexism while being explained away by privileged instigators as a simple misunderstanding or oversensitivity. DiAngelo (2018) takes this a step further pointing out that white people perpetrating these microaggressions often emphasize their positive intentions rather than the actual negative impact of these behaviors on marginalized people.

In order to be effective, allies must address marginalized beneficiary needs to **increase inclusion and acceptance, challenge bias and empower the intended beneficiary while, advocating for them (Collier, 2019).** Allies must also **skillfully address the occurrence while acknowledging their own privilege and recognizing identity differences without offering dependency-oriented assistance (Collier 2019).** Allies must simultaneously address the offender in a way that protects relationships and ideally leads to behavioral modification. While there has been research from the perspective of the ally and the victim thus far, there has not been any research exploring both perspectives for the same event. This research seeks to leverage triadic analysis of critical events where attempted allyship occurs.

Socially dominant populations often deny their privilege and justify existing systemic inequalities (Baker and Fausset, 2015, Knowles et al., 2014, Lowery et al., 2007, Hetey and Eberhardt, 2018, DiAngelo, 2018). Professional diversity educators often encounter defensive emotional reactions, conscious and subconscious resistance, and back-lash from their students (Ragins & Ehrhardt, 2021). Allyship is an informal version of diversity education. In cases where both the aggressor and ally are both members of a socially dominant population, allyship behaviors can be reframed as deviant in that they "run counter to social expectations, [and] are purposeful and effortful" (Williams & Sharif, 2021). For example, allyship behavior among whites breaks with white solidarity, "the unspoken agreement among whites to not talk openly and honestly about race and to avoid causing another white person to feel racial discomfort by confronting them when they or do something racially problematic" (Sleeter, 1996). So allyship is clearly deviant from race-based social roles. In terms of incivility's second criteria, ambiguity, allyship attempts are inherently prosocial behaviors directed at marginalized beneficiaries but simultaneously breaks from white solidarity, potentially alienating a white person in the process. Poorly executed, botched allyship can damage relationships with the intended beneficiary.

Commented [CR1]: <https://davidakenny.net/ip/triadic.htm>

The perception that A has of B's perception of C or A(B(C)) is a triadic perception

- Bond, C. F., Jr., Horn, E. M., & Kenny, D. A. (1997). A model for triadic relations. *Psychological Methods*, 2, 79-94. doi:10.1037/1082-989X.2.1.79
- Kenny, D. A., Bond, C. F., Jr., Mohr, C. D., & Horn, E. M. (1996). Do we know how much people like one another? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71, 928-936. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.71.5.928

Commented [CR2]: Ragins, B. R., & Ehrhardt, K. (2021). Gaining perspective: The impact of close cross-race friendships on diversity training and education. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 106(6), 856.

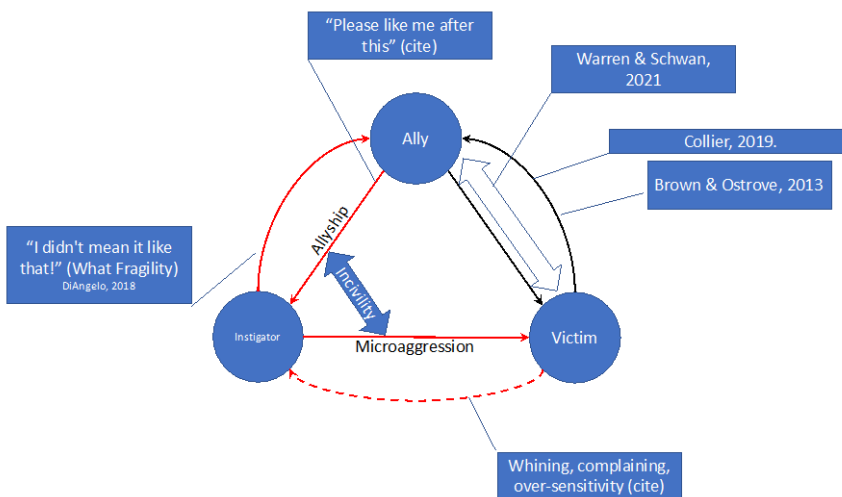
Therein lies the challenge for allies is that they must engage in further incivility to address the initial incivility. While there is a tactful way to go about it, allies and observers may have ambivalent perceptions towards these interactions. Therefore, we theorize that

H1 Dependency-oriented allyship will convey incivility to intended beneficiaries.

H2 White allies providing feedback to a white instigator will be perceived as more uncivil by white observers.

Worthy of note is that allyship is not limited to privileged employees as they could be from different non-dominant groups (Brown & Ostrove, 2013).

Allyship often occurs across cultural lines and the body of research often adopts a singular perspective of those involved in the process when the reality is that there are at least three. Considering that allyship behavior in this context is in response to some microaggression, I'll be leveraging terminology from incivility theory to clarify the roles of those involved, namely the instigator, target and the observer, who upon intervening evolves into an ally.



OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Instigator: the one who engages in microaggressions (incivility) towards someone with a marginalized identity. For the purposes of this project, the instigator also receives feedback from the ally.

Target: the one with the marginalized identity who receives the microaggression from the instigator and is the intended beneficiary of the allyship behavior.

Ally refers to the observer who witnesses a microaggression between the instigator and their target. The ally takes an active roll (compared to the observer) by choosing to intervene and provide support the target by providing feedback to the instigator.

PARTICIPANTS

Target perspective (beneficiary from the Ally's perspective)

We invite participants identifying as members of marginalized groups (race, sexual orientation, disability, etc.) to recount an incident from the past month in which they were the intended beneficiary of someone's attempted allyship behavior (effective or ineffective) to relate their experience and provide the contact information to the ally.

Ally Perspective

For those referred by the beneficiary, we ask if they recall the incident. If so, we ask them to recount the incident followed by the same questions as the target and inquire if they still have contact with the instigator to whom they provided feedback or intervention. We ask about their relationship with the instigator and then request this individual's contact information.

Separately, we also seek out allies (without referral from targets) by asking participants to recount a time in the past month in which they attempted to stand up for someone else with a marginalized identity. We then request contact information for both the instigator and the target.

Instigator perspective (target from allyship perspective)

Due to the anticipated challenges of finding people willing to discuss their involvement as the instigator, we also seek out instigators independently of ally referrals. According to DiAngelo (2018) white fragility is often manifested as a focus on intentions rather than impact. Accordingly, we seek out instigators by asking them to recount a time in the past month in which someone attempted to offer feedback or correction about something they said that was taken out of context from their desired intentions. This approach is intended to protect the ego of the offending party in order to facilitate data collection. These participants will be told that we are interested in their relationships with the ally and target with no mention of sexism, racism, etc. We ask the same questions of the instigator and inquire if they still have contact with the target and ally from the event they recounted. We ask about their relationship with both the ally and the target and then request their contact information.