

## Dismantling Bias Conference Series

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# A Difference in Perspective: Linking Empathy to Allyship Behaviors via Authentic Emotional Connections

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**A Difference in Perspective:  
Linking Empathy to Allyship Behaviors via Authentic Emotional Connections**

Current allyship literature has largely overlooked the perspectives of historically marginalized group members. Specifically, allyship research has centered when and how members of dominant identity groups (e.g., White or male) perceive themselves to be allies (e.g., Sumerau et al., 2021; Radke et al., 2020; De Souza & Schmader, 2021). We argue that movements toward workplace equity must focus on how members of historically marginalized groups perceive allyship attempts from dominant group members (e.g., Bettencourt, 2020; Johnson & Pietri, 2000; Rabelo, Robothan & McCluney, 2021) and how to promote authentic interpersonal connections between dominant and historically marginalized coworkers as a precursor of this perceived allyship behavior.

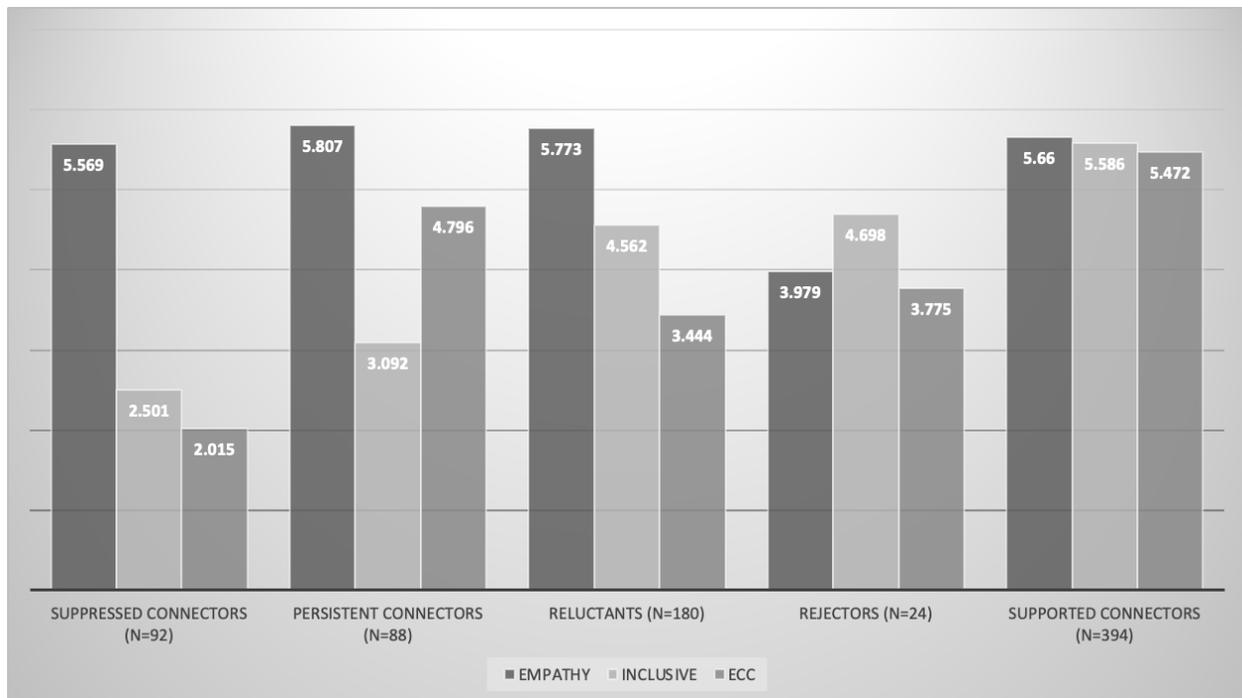
Following the Shared Sisterhood paradigm (Opie & Livingston, 2021), we assert that allyship behavior will be better understood if we examine critical processes from the individual, interpersonal, and institutional perspectives that lead historically marginalized group members to perceive dominant group members as actual allies. We introduce authentic interpersonal connections as a central linking variable between individual self-perceptions of the desire to be an ally (e.g., empathy; Chong & Mohr, 2020) and actual allyship behavior. Individual desire to connect with others and institutional support for such connection will be precipitating factors for authentic interpersonal connection and there will be a difference across racioethnic groups in the conditions that make these authentic interpersonal connections likely to occur. We test these expectations in three studies: Study 1- a completed cross-sectional survey of working women in the United States; and two studies in progress- experimental studies crafted to investigate the relationship between authentic interpersonal connections and allyship behavior given varying institutional climates.

In Study 1, we demonstrate that specific profiles represent employee experiences related to authentic interpersonal connections at work, and that these profiles are related to racioethnicity. We conducted latent profile analysis to examine the ways in which individual and institutional factors co-exist with authentic interpersonal connections with coworkers. We include individuals' empathic concern (Wilhelm & Bekkers, 2010), a key precursor of helping others (Schroeder et al., 1988), as an individual indicator of a willingness to connect with others at work. We include inclusive climate (Nishii, 2013) as an institutional factor that supports connection with coworkers, by creating a context that works to eliminate relational sources of bias at work that are related to unequal access to organizational resources. Finally, we include emotional carrying capacity of coworkers (Stephens et al., 2013), which represents the degree

to which people feel able to share their authentic emotions with their coworkers, as indicative of whether an employee experiences the authentic interpersonal connections we posit as a precursor to allyship behavior.

We expected certain profiles to emerge in our data, and our hypotheses were generally supported using best practices of latent profile analysis (e.g., Asparouhov & Muthén, 2014; Gabriel et al., 2015; Spurk et al., 2020).

Profile number	Profile description	Empathy	Institutional inclusion	Authentic emotional connection
1	Suppressed connectors: Want to connect, climate not conducive, do not connect.	High	Low	Low
2	Persistent connectors: Want to connect, and do so even when the climate is not conducive to it.	High	Low	High
3	Reluctants: Want to be an ally, and could, but, for some reason, they do not. ALLY OR CONNECT?	High	High	Low
4	Rejectors: Could connect in their organization, but do not want to, so they do not.	Low	High	Low
5	Supported connectors: Want to connect, and can, so they do.	High	High	High



We also find evidence of racioethnic differences among our women respondents in line with our expectations.

In Study 2, we will demonstrate that the hypothesized effects of these profile constellations are replicable in a pre-registered online experiment and that authentic interpersonal connections are related to expected allyship behaviors. We will manipulate the institutional support for connection with inclusive climate and individual desire to connect with demonstrations of empathy. We then will assess expected emotional carrying capacity and expected allyship behaviors in a racially diverse sample of women to replicate the same patterns of effects as we observe in our latent profiles, while also demonstrating the relationship between authentic connection and allyship behaviors. Then, in Study 3, we will use our findings from Study 2 to investigate critical mediators of the effect of empathy and inclusive climates on emotional carrying capacity and expected allyship behaviors in a follow-up pre-registered online experiment.

Together, these studies will demonstrate the importance of authentic emotional connections to understanding allyship behavior, centering the perspectives of members of historically marginalized groups. We also contribute to the continued theoretical development of the nascent allyship literature by providing a first empirical test of critical tenets of the Shared Sisterhood paradigm toward promoting equity at work.

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