

Allyship as a Diversity and Inclusion Tool in the Workplace

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Abstract

Purpose — This chapter reviews previous research on allyship: non-minority individuals who choose to support minorities while working to end discrimination and prejudice. In particular, the focus of this chapter is on how allyship applies to the workplace. We argue that allyship can be a diversity management tool to help reduce workplace discrimination.

Methodology — To explore this topic, we conducted a literature review on allyship in the workplace and synthesized previous research together. We examined research from both organizational and non-organizational settings.

Findings — Our review of previous literature is divided into three sections. First, we discuss what all entails allyship, including knowledge, communication, and, in particular, action. Next, we discuss the many outcomes previous research suggests comes from allyship (including benefits to other individuals, benefits to the overall culture, and benefits to the ally him or herself). Finally, we conclude with a discussion of who is likely to become an ally as well as the journey a person goes through to become a true ally.

Value — This chapter can be useful for practitioners who wish to promote allyship within his or her workplace. Organizations that want to strengthen their diversity and inclusion climate can consider developing ally training programs and promoting ally culture. Additionally, this chapter can be useful for researchers who wish to study the topic. Currently, there is a dearth of research on allyship specifically within the workplace; this chapter can help future researchers identify areas for empirical exploration.

Keywords: Allyship; allies; diversity management; diversity intervention; workplace inclusion; organizational culture change

Within the workplace, supporting diversity and achieving equity and inclusion are important in order to ensure that organizations are as effective and as socially responsible as possible. Although minorities often play important roles in these efforts, they need not work alone. To complement the work of minorities, allies, that is, non-minority individuals who are supportive of minority communities, can be an important diversity management tool for promoting equity and inclusion. As this chapter will discuss, research has shown that allies can be powerful tools to help promote equity and inclusion. Therefore, management and workplace professionals can leverage previous research on the topic (from both organizational and non-organizational contexts) and apply it to job settings to gain the many benefits allyship can yield.

The goal of this chapter is to review previous literature on allyship across multiple disciplines and apply it to the workplace. We present a representative sample of all the topics and concerns that have been being discussed within the allyship literature and synthesize it into one review. After our literature review, we end the chapter with a discussion of the practical implications as well as future research suggestions stemming from our review. Overall, we frame our discussions in this chapter to address how allyship can be an important diversity management tool that can be used to enact positive change within organizations. We aim to make this chapter a useful tool for HR and management academics and professionals; we present the topic so that practitioners can easily apply the content to their organization, as well as to spur future research among academics on the topic.

Allyship Defined

Allies are defined as “individuals who strive to end oppression through supporting and advocating on behalf of the oppressed” (Sabat, Martinez, & Wessel, 2013, p. 480). Allies are typically non-minorities who use their majority status to enact positive change. For instance, a White person might be an ally for people of color, a heterosexual person might be an ally for people in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community, or a man might be an ally for women. The idea of allyship has been discussed among scholars for many decades, although this particular term (i.e., “ally” or “allyship”) is not always used. For instance, an early discussion on ally development (Washington & Evans, 1991) relied on Helm’s (1984) work on racial identity development. Helms did not use the term “ally” when discussing how White people can come to terms with their race and use it for the benefit of others, but there are clear parallels. This demonstrates that the concept of allyship has been discussed for a long time in many contexts (even if the exact word was not always used).

As will be discussed, allyship has not received extensive empirical attention in organizational settings (Sabat et al., 2013). However, the topic has been extensively studied in other fields, such as childhood education (e.g., Clark, 2010; Zammitt, Pepperell, & Coe, 2015), college education (e.g., Alimo, 2012; Munin & Speight, 2010; Ryan, Broad, Walsh, & Nutter, 2013), and therapy (Asta & Vacha-Haase, 2013; Spanierman & Smith, 2017a; Sue, 2017), among other fields. Allyship is prominently discussed within actual organizations, though. For examples, many organizations have employee resource groups (ERGs) which often include allies within minorities. Some prominent organizations that have ERGs include American Express (American Express Global Diversity and Inclusion, n.d.), Google (Employees and Culture, n.d.), and Microsoft (Global Diversity and Inclusion Home, n.d.). Even though organizational scholars may not have conducted extensive empirical research on the topic, organizations themselves are aware of and promoting the topic.

Allyship may be particularly useful as a cross-cultural tool. Across the world, the amount and type of discrimination and prejudice that is most salient differ, as well as legal protections for minority groups (Lloren & Parini, 2017), and the effects are often influenced by the particular region of the world being studied as well (Górska, Bilewicz, & Winiewski, 2017; Shaffer, Joplin, Bell, Lau, & Oguz, 2000). Organizations that are globally oriented may struggle to find a coherent diversity and inclusion strategy that works regardless of location. However, allyship can exist everywhere, regardless of what type of discrimination is most salient or what legal protections exist. Therefore, this is a diversity and inclusion initiative that many global organizations may find to be a particularly useful tool to include in their programming.

As stated, the goal of this chapter is to demonstrate how allyship can be a tool HR practitioners can use to spur positive change within organizations, as well as to promote further research and learning on the topic from management-related academics. To accomplish this, we conducted an extensive literature review on the topic and we synthesized all the previous research on the topic into one comprehensive chapter. Before we review the literature, though, we will first explain our methodology for gathering sources relevant to our topic.

Literature Review Methodology

We conducted a two-step process to review the literature. First, we conducted multiple formal literature searches of the PsycINFO and PsycARTICLES databases. Keywords we searched for included allyship, workplace ally, male ally, straight ally, heterosexual ally, and white ally (note that for each of these keywords, both the singular and plural versions, i.e., ally and allies, were searched for). This yielded a number of results. In order to keep our discussion of the topic to be focused on workplace allyship, we excluded some of the results based on the context in which they discussed the topic. For instance, we excluded any search results that were

related to early childhood education, because we felt that allyship among children is different than allyship among adults, which is our primary population of interest. We also excluded any search results about allyship as an alliance in therapy, as the meaning of allyship in this setting is different from the meaning of allyship in workplace settings. We also excluded dissertations from our search.

Although these literature searches resulted in an extensive list of results that provided a strong foundation for understanding allyship in the workplace, it was incomplete. As previously discussed, many scholars have discussed the topic of supporting minority communities without using the terms ally or allyship. For example, discussions of allyship would be incomplete without discussions of identity development. A White person learning to understand his or her role within the context of racial discrimination and what role he or she can play in addressing the issues may or may not use the word “ally” but it is clearly related. Therefore, the second stage of our literature review was to read the sources we uncovered during our formal searches and then build our literature review based on the citations our sources themselves included. This helped us to build our literature review beyond a basic overview and to be able to explore the topic in a more detailed manner.

Our final literature search yielded an extensive review not only of research on allyship in organizational settings but of all the larger issues, implications, and ramifications of the topic in general. Overall, this literature review yielded a large enough body of work as to allow for readers to fully understand the topic and use the results. We split our literature review into three sections: what makes an ally, outcomes of allyship, and ally promotion and formation.

What Makes an Ally?

Many people identify as an ally, but what is it that allies do? What behaviors should allies perform and what processes should they go through in order to show that they are true allies and that this is not just an empty title? Many scholars and practitioners have discussed this question and have offered multiple ideas, but there is no one agreed-upon set of behaviors; instead, different authors offer multiple suggestions for what allies do that are not in conflict with each other but instead add to each other to form a full picture of allyship. After reviewing the previous literature, we suggest that allyship behaviors and processes can be thought of as three broad categories: knowledge and awareness, communication and confrontation, and action and advocacy.

Knowledge and Awareness

The foundation of what it is that allies do is that first and foremost they must be aware of and educate themselves about the experiences minorities go through. Although it is not possible for someone on the outside to fully understand what it is like to be a minority, it is important (and necessary) for allies to learn about and be

aware of minority experiences. Gaining knowledge is key for allies; in developing a measure of allyship, Jones, Brewster, and Jones (2014) found that knowledge and awareness were two of the three major factors identified by allies as critical aspects of what makes them an ally.

There are many topics of which allies can learn about. For instance, allies should be aware of and understanding of the mechanisms that cause discrimination. In the context of gender, Drury and Kaiser (2014) suggested that male allies must learn to recognize sexism when it occurs. However, Becker and Swim (2011) found that this can be especially difficult for men to do when sexism is subtle (as compared to overt sexism); allies should be especially mindful of this. For other communities where misinformation can be common, such as the LGBTQ community, understanding minority issues can also entail learning to separate myth from fact (Perrin, Bhattacharyya, Snipes, Calton, & Heesacker, 2014). This type of learning can come from talking directly with minorities, and/or by seeking out external resources to find out more.

Understanding minority experiences is not solely about minorities, though; part of what needs to be understood is the role the majority population plays, be it intentional or unintentional, in minority experiences (Carlson, 2008; Montgomery & Stewart, 2012; Reason & Broido, 2005). For instance, Spanierman and Smith (2017b) suggested that White people must understand institutional racism, White privilege, and their own possible racism in order to truly be allies to people of color. Related, Ashburn-Nardo (2018) highlighted the importance of understanding and being aware of one's own prejudices and beliefs; she argued that allies should not inadvertently be "part of the problem" (p. 374). This type of learning can be challenging and psychologically difficult for non-minorities to fully confront, but it is necessary in order to truly be an ally and advocate for minority communities.

Communication and Confrontation

Although it is important for an ally to be aware of and learn the issues and experiences minorities go through, knowledge alone is not enough; the ally needs to feel as though he or she should do something about it. One thing allies do with their knowledge is to communicate with others about these issues. For instance, Fingerhut (2011) suggested that for a heterosexual to be an ally to the LGBTQ community, this person must be an active participant in discussions about ways to promote LGBTQ rights, and he or she must also initiate these discussions at times as well. DeTurk (2011) echoed this sentiment; in a qualitative analysis of interviews with allies, she found that allies encourage discussion of these issues with others using a variety of methods, such as sharing relevant information about minority groups, sharing their own personal experiences or perspectives, gently questioning others and challenging assumptions, or by simply encouraging others to be thoughtful in what they say. DeTurk also added that these communications should be public and on display for others to witness. According to her, allies should be a visible

sign of acceptance, and should not hesitate to voice their views on social justice, as well as teach others about these issues.

One particular subset of communication is confrontation; allies often confront prejudice and discrimination in others. This may happen in the context of language (such as when someone informally says “That’s so gay” during a conversation in a break room) or behaviors (such as when a person is not considered for a promotional opportunity solely because of his or her race). Within previous research, the role of allies in confronting others is perhaps the most commonly discussed suggestion for what it is allies do (Ashburn-Nardo, 2018; DeTurk, 2011; Drury & Kaiser, 2014; Lapointe, 2015; Sabat et al., 2014; Spanierman & Smith, 2017b); it is widely agreed upon that this is a key aspect of being an ally to any minority group. Confrontation can lead to positive change; a recent meta-analysis showed that confronting prejudice can be effective in changing behaviors (Smith et al., 2018). Lapointe discussed confrontation in the context of “breaking down the bystander effect”; allies not only refuse to be passive bystanders themselves by speaking up in the face of prejudice but also encourage others to not be bystanders or ignore prejudice either. DeTurk added that allies at times use the different sources of authority they may possess to combat prejudice and discrimination. For instance, an ally might invoke an institutional policy (such as an HR anti-discrimination policy) when they see prejudice occurs.

Action and Advocacy

The third major activity allies do is behavior; in addition to allies learning and understanding the issues at hand as well as communicating with others about it, allies also do things to support and promote minority communities. There are many behaviors allies can do. First, allies can be advocates to tangibly benefit minority populations. For instance, Sabat et al. (2014) suggested allies display signs at their workplace to show they are supportive of minority rights (such as a heterosexual displaying a Safe-Zone sticker indicating support for LGBTQ people). Additionally, Fingerhut (2011) suggested allies can donate time or money to causes, or they could sign petitions (such as a petition to bar LGBTQ discrimination). Participating in events, rallies, and trainings are also an important part of ally advocacy (DeTurk, 2011; Fingerhut; Sabat et al.). Perrin et al. (2014) built off of this idea by suggesting that advocacy can be more public, such as supporting anti-discrimination publicly in an online blog or other platform.

Other advocacy behaviors may feel less immediately tangible but can still be powerful change agents. For instance, DeTurk (2011) suggested that allies can help introduce minority-supportive ideas into their organization, such as within the upper leadership circle. Spanierman and Smith (2017b) suggested that White allies (for example) can actively work to build coalitions with people of color. These types of longer-term behaviors may not seem to yield immediate results but are important in that they can plant seeds that can later result in large-scale change. Allies are particularly well suited to engage in these types of behaviors, because of the power and

social capital they wield in organizations (DeTurk; Sabat et al., 2014). Non-minorities are often afforded a level of power and respect; allies wield this power to promote positive change.

Related to our previous discussion about communication, though, it should be noted that much advocacy work occurs in conversations between people (Lapointe, 2015; Spanierman & Smith, 2017b). Often, educating people on minority issues and persuading them to change their minds is a powerful form of advocacy. As was the case previously, this may feel less tangible and immediately effective – but it is still an important part of ally advocacy. Many times, people may not be allies because they are uneducated or uninformed about the issues, and not because they are unsupportive. If an ally educates these people, it can help create positive change (and possibly create more allies as well).

Finally, it should also be noted that allies can support minorities directly. Ashburn-Nardo (2018) highlighted the importance of offering emotional support to minorities. Additionally, DeTurk (2011) gave an example of an ally letting immigrants who do not speak English well and do not have many resources use the ally's phone and computer as well as help these immigrants with communication in general. Something as simple as this may not be overly arduous for an ally but may be invaluable for the minority. DeTurk also suggested that offering rides to doctor appointments is another example of supportive ally behavior. Examples such as these demonstrate that an ally can support a person in general and need not solely be supportive of the person in the context of combatting prejudice and discrimination (which may be what most people think of when they think of allyship).

What Do Minorities Want?

Most of the research on ally behavior and cognitions has been conducted from the allies' perspective; previous studies examine interviews and surveys that ask allies what it is that they feel is important for themselves to do to support minority communities. Brooks and Edwards (2009) included this perspective in their study, but interestingly also interviewed 10 minorities (LGBT people in their particular study) to ask what it is they want from allies. Many of the themes they uncovered were similar to what allies self-identified, such as inclusion and equity. However, LGBT individuals identified another need they want from allies that was more personal: safety. In particular, the LGBT people in this study wanted help from their allies to ensure they felt not just physically safe in the workplace but also emotionally safe. This was not an idea non-minorities thought about (possibly because they do not have to worry about this in the same way minorities do), highlighting the importance of talking to both allies and minorities when exploring this topic.

Outcomes of Allyship

Allyship can be a crucial diversity management tool for ending discrimination and achieving equal rights for oppressed groups in many ways. In this section, we will discuss previous research on the various ways allies have positive impacts on many aspects of the workplace. It should be noted that as this is a burgeoning field of research, there are less empirical tests of allies than of other workplace constructs. As more research attention is given to the topic, we expect a deeper empirical understanding of the phenomenon to emerge. However, it may always be a relatively under-studied topic compared to other workplace phenomena; the process through which allies affect others is complex, and it is difficult to pinpoint exactly when and how they have an effect on others. As discussed previously, much of what allies do goes beyond simply confronting others (which is somewhat easier to scientifically test); the general culture they create and impact this culture has may be less measurable. That being said, after reviewing previous research on the topic, we have identified three ways in which allies have a positive impact: their impact on other individuals, their impact on the culture in general, and the impact being an ally has on oneself.

Allies' Impact on Other Individuals

Allies can impact other individuals in many ways. First, allies educate others about minority issues. Education is important because it is through this that meaningful change is accomplished; if allies do not educate others but only reprimand others for incorrect beliefs, any change will be superficial and short-lived. The role of education was highlighted in a study by [Rostosky, Black, Riggle, and Rosenkrantz \(2015\)](#). In their study, 292 self-identified allies to the LGBTQ community completed an open-ended questionnaire about their experiences as an ally. One common theme identified in their responses was that allies consistently reported being able to educate others as a positive aspect of being an ally. One respondent quoted by the authors discussed her experiences educating the administration of her organization, highlighting the fact that education can occur with peers or with leaders (thus leading to organizational change).

Most generally, the goal of being an ally is to change the attitudes and behavior of others in order to decrease discrimination and prejudice among others. Through educating others, it is possible that people's attitudes and behaviors can change. Indeed, allyship can be thought of as a specific case of the general bystander effect; research shows that when bystanders step up and say something about what they are witnessing, positive change can often ensue (e.g., [Coker et al., 2015](#); [Midgett, Doumas, Trull, & Johnson, 2017](#)). As previously mentioned, a recent meta-analysis of confrontation research shows that it generally can be effective ([Smith et al., 2018](#)). For example, one study on this topic examined participants who were confronted after making discriminatory statements about race ([Czopp, Monteith, & Mark, 2006](#)). Across three separate studies, the authors found that being confronted

made participants feel worse about themselves, made them less likely to make stereotypical statements after, and made them endorse less prejudicial attitudes after as well. Similarly, some studies have also found that when overhearing others confront prejudice, people are more likely to endorse anti-prejudice attitudes and beliefs themselves (Blanchard, Lilly, & Vaughn, 1991; Monteith, Deneen, & Tooman, 1996).

One may question why it is that allies must play roles as educators. Instead, perhaps this responsibility should (or could) be on minorities, as they have firsthand knowledge of the issues at hand and could therefore more authentically discuss the topic. We are not arguing against this; everyone can play a role as an educator in the fight against discrimination. Also, it should be noted that the effectiveness of anyone as an educator (be it an ally or a minority) depends on how the person communicates. To this point, Hyers (2010) found that nonhostile assertive confrontation styles were more effective than other confrontation styles. In general, how one educates others is an important consideration of anyone trying to educate and change others, regardless of if he or she is an ally or a minority.

That being said, research shows that allies can often educate and influence people's attitudes and behaviors in a way that minorities may not be able to do as easily. Why is this? One reason is that allies may be seen as more "legitimate"; in arguing for minority rights and equality, they are not seen as seeking personal gain, so their request seems more authentic to others (Drury & Kaiser, 2014). This point was highlighted in a study by Eliezer and Major (2011), who had participants view scenarios of sexist behavior. They found that males were viewed more positively than women for calling out sexism, even though it was the same sexist behavior in both situations. Of course, when minorities argue for rights and equality, they are not necessarily solely seeking personal gain, but this point may be lost on others (especially if these others are prejudiced themselves).

Thus far, all the research described here focuses on the impact allies have on other non-minorities. However, allies can positively impact minorities as well. One particular example of this involves LGBTQ people. Much research exists to support the suggestion that allies can make LGBTQ people feel comfortable enough to "come out" and disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity to others (Day & Schoenrade, 1997; Law, Martinez, Ruggs, Hebl, & Akers, 2011; Ragins, Singh, & Cornwell, 2007; Wessel, 2017), which in turn is related to a variety of positive workplace outcomes (Day & Schoenrade, 2000; Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). This suggests that allies can make minorities feel comfortable and safe in the workplace, and therefore make them want to be more authentic because of it.

Allies' Impact on the Organizational Culture

Being an ally can also contribute to a culture of support within an organization; instead of allies only influencing people one at a time, allies can also help create an environment in which tolerance and acceptance are embraced by all. Much research

shows that when there is a culture of support within an organization, there are many positive outcomes for minorities. For instance, within the LGBTQ literature, there is extensive research suggesting that organizational-supportive policies are associated with multiple positive outcomes, such as well-being and job satisfaction (Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Lloren & Parini, 2017; Ragsin & Cornwell, 2001; Rostosky & Riggle, 2002). Examples of organizational-supportive policies that lead to these outcomes include nondiscrimination policies, health insurance for same-sex partners, and disciplinary measures to prevent discrimination. If an organization supports minorities (i.e., if the organization itself is seen as an “ally”), positive outcomes will ensue, in much the same way positive outcomes come from individuals being supportive of minorities.

It should be noted that in order for allies to fully impact the culture in a meaningful way, their own motivation and dedication to being an ally must run deep. Russell and Bohan (2016) referred to this as the difference between first-order and second-order change. They defined first-order change as “relatively superficial; it aims to modify existing practices but does not challenge institutional structures or hierarchies of power and privilege” (p. 341). On the other hand, second-order change is “foundational change; it works to alter structures and challenge hierarchies of power” (p. 341). Russell and Bohan argued that second-order change is necessary in order for allies to make a real impact on those around them. This theme also emerged in Grzanka, Adler, and Blazer’s (2015) qualitative interviews with allies; respondents reported that allyship must be “active” and not “passive” in order to be truly effective. In general, it is important to emphasize that allies should be truly motivated to enact real change, instead of only generally supporting minority rights but not doing specific actions to achieve this goal. It is through this that the real impacts of allyship are seen.

Outcomes Experienced by Allies

In addition to allies positively impacting others individually as well as influencing the general culture, there are many ways being an ally affects oneself directly. First, many allies report feeling better about themselves because of being an ally. This was extensively discussed in Rostosky et al.’s (2015) qualitative study, in which allies consistently discussed the feeling of growth and how much they learned about themselves because of their status as an ally. Much of this growth and development leads to feelings of personal meaning and integrity for their work as allies (Smith & Redington, 2010). Grzanka et al. (2015) also highlighted the fact that being an ally just feels good (especially when being appreciated by others).

Allies also consistently report positive changes in their relationships with others due to being an ally. Duhigg, Rostosky, Gray, and Wimsatt (2010) interviewed allies about their experiences; this qualitative study as well as Rostosky et al.’s (2015) yielded two consistent themes. First, allies reported making friendships and stronger personal connections with others due to their status as an ally. Being an ally exposes a person more deeply to a new community they may not have met

previously; this type of work draws people together and results in better connections. A second consistent theme in these two qualitative studies was that allies also felt positive about being part of the minority community more broadly. Allies are important members of a minority community, and membership in a community is a positive experience for many.

It should be noted that not everything about being an ally is positive; at times allies experience negative outcomes because of being an ally to a minority community. For some, speaking out about prejudice and discrimination could be a fearful experience (Smith & Redington, 2010); talking about these things may result in others viewing them negatively, possibly leading to isolation and/or career problems (Sue, 2017). Being an ally can also at times feel uncomfortable if the ally experiences “imposter syndrome,” which refers to feeling uncomfortable because of not knowing enough about the issues minorities experience (Sue, Torino, Capodilupo, Rivera, & Lin, 2009). Finally, for some communities, being an ally may make others believe one is a minority him or herself, which can be uncomfortable for some. Many have found that heterosexual allies can at times fear others thinking they are LGBTQ themselves (Duhigg et al., 2010; Grzanka et al., 2015). Although there are at times negative aspects of being an ally, many still take on this role, suggesting that for many, the positive outcomes outweigh the negative.

Ally Promotion and Formation

As can be seen, there are multiple benefits of allyship. Therefore, it is important for individuals and organizations to promote the development of allies in the workplace. In the following section, we will explore the promotion and formation of allyship; what makes someone want to become an ally; and how do people become allies. As will be discussed, becoming an ally is more than just learning knowledge and subsequently self-identifying as an ally; many have reported it as a developmental journey that changes the way the person views the world. At times, this journey can be difficult, but it is necessary in order to become a true ally.

What Makes Someone Choose to Become an Ally?

Those who choose to become allies have many characteristics in common; identifying these common characteristics may be helpful for organizations in targeting an audience for allyship development programs. However, it should first be noted that much of this depends on what community the person wants to be an ally for. For instance, women are more likely than men to become allies to the LGBTQ community (Fingerhut, 2011), but this finding does not make sense in the context of allyship and gender (i.e., women would not be thought of as allies for gender equality as they are considered the minority group in this context). Overall, though, there are some characteristics that have been identified as somewhat common across all types of allyship.

First, previous research has identified that those who feel some sort of personal connection to a minority community are more likely to become an ally. For instance, a common and simple way of connecting with the community in this way is by being friends with a minority (Fingerhut, 2011; Scheer & Poteat, 2016). Sue (2017) argued that in order to become an ally, one needs to “make it personal.” In other words, the motivation to become an ally often starts with knowing someone and therefore feeling a direct and authentic connection to minority issues, struggles, and experiences. Seeing someone one cares about (such as a friend) experience hardship due to their minority status can inspire a person to become an ally in order to help.

A personal connection to minorities or a minority community may drive someone to become an ally for multiple reasons. In part, this may be effective because of the emotional aspect of connecting with someone else. Being friends with someone makes one care about the person, which then therefore results in one wanting the best for the person – and therefore standing up for them as an ally. However, a personal connection may also function simply by educating the potential ally about the issues surrounding the minority community. As previously noted, Jones et al. (2014) found that knowledge of minority issues as well as awareness of oppression were two important factors for identifying potential LGBTQ allies. Having a personal connection with a minority or a minority community may afford the potential ally an opportunity to both learn the necessary knowledge and to become aware of the oppression these communities face.

Another theme common in previous literature with regard to who chooses to become an ally is motivation to become an ally because of feelings of justice or feelings against prejudice (Fingerhut, 2011). Although a personal connection is often important for ally development, Edwards (2006) suggested that this may not be enough. Rather, he argued that being motivated to become an ally because of social justice leads to more sustainable and meaningful allyship than motivation because of altruism and/or self-interest. In DeTurk’s (2011) analysis of qualitative interviews with allies, many described becoming an ally as a “moral imperative.” These people feel as though it is simply the right thing to do, regardless of whether or not it directly affects them or their friends and family. For some, it may be that the journey to becoming an ally starts with a personal connection with a minority but is sustained because of strong feelings of justice and the desire to stop the discrimination and prejudice their eyes have been opened to.

Dillon et al. (2004) as well as Duhigg et al. (2010) both conducted qualitative interview studies examining (among other factors) what makes someone decide to become an ally, and their findings reflected the themes previously discussed here. However, they also both highlighted that for many people, there is often a specific incident that triggers a person to decide to become an ally. Dillon et al. referred to this as a “critical incident”; that is, some sort of turning point that caused the interviewees to make “attitudinal, affective, behavioral, and/or cognitive changes” (p. 43). Duhigg et al. highlighted that this can often be an early life experience with one’s family; a family member who exhibited prejudice and discrimination may cause the child to choose to disavow these attitudes and beliefs when they grow up.

Alternatively, it was pointed out that an early life experience could be positive or negative and still lead to one deciding to become an ally. For example, a family member may stand up against discrimination in a very public way, resulting in the child choosing to become an ally later in life as well.

How Does Someone Become an Ally?

Becoming an ally is a developmental journey; it is more than simply learning about the topic (Collins & Chlup, 2014; Sue, 2017). One cannot simply self-identify and truly be an ally to minority communities. The process is complex and engages a person's affect, cognition, and behaviors. In particular, Jones et al. (2014) highlighted the importance of developing one's skills in ally development. Learning facts and gaining knowledge, though important for ally development, is not enough. Some have proposed stage models of the developmental process people go through in becoming allies; we review some of these models here.

Bishop (2002) presented a five-stage model of ally development that is applicable to all types of allies (i.e., allies to racial minorities, women, LGBTQ individuals). She suggested that the first step to becoming an ally is recognizing that oppression exists and seeking to understand it. This relates to the motivation to become an ally we previously discussed; oftentimes, it is some sort of personal connection or critical incident that leads to one understanding these issues and therefore deciding to be an ally (Dillon et al., 2004; Sue, 2017). The second step in Bishop's model is to recognize that oppressions intersect. To have a deep and nuanced understanding of prejudice and discrimination, it is important to understand that people with multiple minority statuses will experience prejudice differently than those with only one. For example, Black people experience discrimination, as do women, but Black women experience unique and different experiences than either group separately – and their experiences are dependent on the ways in which their race and gender interact with each other (Livingston, Rosette, & Washington, 2012; Rosette & Livingston, 2012).

The first two stages of Bishop's (2002) model focused on the individual learning about the issues minorities face. The next stages become more personal and require the individual to look inward and learn about him- or herself. The third stage in this model is for the individual to address the guilt associated with having a privileged identity. After learning about the challenges minorities face, a non-minority may feel guilty and uncomfortable that they do not have to face these issues, and also may inadvertently benefit from the system that causes oppression against minorities in the first place. The person must learn to understand and deal with these feelings instead of ignoring them or push them away, which can be a challenge for many. Ashburn-Nardo (2018) highlighted the importance of this in her discussion of what allies do: self-regulating one's own thoughts and behaviors regarding minority issues.

After this, the fourth step in Bishop's (2002) model is to understand one's personal areas of marginalization and work for change. In other words, potential allies

need to explore in what ways they personally have experienced prejudice; this understanding helps them to better understand what minorities go through, which leads to them being better allies themselves. Finally, the last step in Bishop's model is to be an ally, in all the ways we have discussed previously, that is, through knowledge as well as action (DeTurk, 2011; Drury & Kaiser, 2014; Fingerhut, 2011; Sabat et al., 2013; Spanierman & Smith, 2017b). As can be seen, this model suggests that much introspection and (at times) difficulties may be encountered, but it will lead to a strong foundation from which allyship can be built.

Part of becoming an ally is learning to understand what it means to be a non-minority (i.e., what it means to be a majority member of society). Helms (1995) and Sue and Sue (2016) both developed models of the stages White people go through to develop their racial identity. These models are similar to the one presented by Bishop (2002) but vary in slight ways to focus more so on race. First, White people are in a stage of unawareness, what Helms referred to as the contact phase, and Sue and Sue referred to as the naiveté phase. In this stage, individuals feel neutral or generally positive about people of color but are unaware of or uneducated about issues of racism and privilege. Sue and Sue suggested that this can be followed by a conformity phase, in which individuals can hold contradictory beliefs and opinions about issues of race, often without realizing it. For instance, they may say they are not racist, but implicitly believe that White culture is superior to other cultures and may deny that discrimination exists, suggesting instead that problems of inequality may be attributed to people of color instead of the society and system in which they live.

The next stages of White racial identity development involve individuals beginning to see issues of discrimination and prejudice around them. Helms (1995) suggested this disintegration phase is marked by feelings of internal conflict and guilt; the person is conscious of issues of race (and how they as a White person benefits from it) and is uncomfortable with it. Similarly, Sue and Sue (2016) referred to this as the dissonance phase. An example of this could be a White person who realizes that she is just as qualified as a person of color but is given more opportunities at work than that person of color is given; this can make her feel guilty for receiving a benefit even though she did not ask for it. Both models suggested that to resolve this dissonance, individuals may try to avoid thinking about the issues and retreat back into White culture (which Helms referred to as the reintegration phase). On the other hand, individuals may decide to do something to resolve this internal conflict. In resolving this internal conflict, the individuals then move forward to later stages.

For those who decide to resolve these internal conflicts, the next stages are marked by the individuals trying to learn and understand issues of race (and their place as White people in them). Helms (1995) suggested that individuals begin this part of the process with the immersion/emersion phase, which entails questioning what it means to be White as well as exploring the ramifications of being White. Prior to this, much of ally development focuses on thinking about people of color; now, though, the individuals begin to think about White people instead. They shift their focus from changing people of color to changing White people and White

culture. Similarly, Sue and Sue (2016) referred to this as first the introspective phase, in which individuals begin to look inward and question these issues, followed by the integrative awareness phase. In this stage, individuals begin to develop a nonracist White identity and begin to understand the role they can play in these issues.

The final stage of White identity proposed by these two models is the culmination of all the thought and introspection the individual has put in thus far; the final stage is to develop a fully formed White identity. Helms (1995) referred to this as the autonomy phase, and Sue and Sue (2016) referred to this as the commitment to antiracist action phase. In this stage, the ally is not only comfortable as a White person and does not feel guilty for his or her race, but also actively behaves and models how an ally should act for others to see. Overall, both models suggested that a person must go through all of these stages (in some form) to become a White ally in the truest sense (and not simply in name only).

Discussion

In this chapter, we argue that allyship is a valuable tool that organizations should consider including in their overall diversity and inclusion strategy. Although often thought of as something individual people do, organizations can also be involved with this by helping to develop and promote allyship programs as well as to create an overall culture of allyship. Indeed, organizations should help to manage these initiatives in order to make them as effective as possible; many have argued that diversity can be very beneficial for organizations, but it needs to be well managed in order for it to yield positive outcomes (Galinsky et al., 2015; Jayne & Dipboye, 2004). Allyship can be less expensive and more personally meaningful for individuals involved than other diversity and inclusion strategies, so it should be investigated by human resources (HR) professionals. From a practical standpoint, Sabat et al. (2013) also pointed out that allies in the workplace can help relieve the burden of diversity management from always having to fall on leadership and HR professionals.

Practical Implications for Organizations

This review has many implications for how HR professionals and managers could use allyship as a diversity management tool to implement change in the workplace. The first and most obvious would be to create and implement ally development training programs. If organizations invested resources into helping more employees become allies, then they could yield all the positive outcomes discussed earlier. It should be noted, though, that as discussed, allyship development is a process (Collins & Chlup, 2014; Sue, 2017). Therefore, any ally development program implemented in workplaces should take this into consideration and be more than just a one-time training; as Jones et al. (2014) highlighted, skill development is more

important in ally training than solely imparting knowledge. Such programs should include self-reflection, discussion with others, and learning opportunities (to address all the issues discussed in the stage models previously; Bishop, 2002; Helms, 1995; Sue & Sue, 2016). For examples of ally development trainings, see Anicha, Burnett, & Bilen-Green, 2015, as well as Wagner, Yates, & Walcott, 2012.

Allies can also be important parts of other diversity management tools that may already be in place. For instance, employee resource groups (ERGs) are spaces where people of similar backgrounds (commonly, but certainly not limited to, race, gender, disability, or sexual orientation) gather to share their experiences and talk about ways their workplace environment can be improved. Often, non-minorities members feel as though they are “not allowed” to be part of a minority-oriented ERG. However, allies should be strongly encouraged to join an ERG. Being a member can help them in their development to become better allies, and it can help the ERG become stronger with the addition of more members and therefore viewpoints and experiences. Similarly, allyship can be promoted as part of mentorship programs. Any mentor who has ally training or at least an understanding of ally issues will be a stronger mentor because of it.

When practitioners are promoting allyship in either development programs, ERGs, mentorship, or any other diversity management tool, they may want to have these opportunities open to all. However, practitioners may want to consider targeting and selecting individuals who are more likely to be receptive to be part of these programs: as discussed, those who have some sort of personal connection to minorities (Fingerhut, 2011; Scheer & Poteat, 2016; Sue, 2017) as well as feelings of social justice (DeTurk, 2011; Edwards, 2006). Perhaps these people may currently be “passive” allies (Grzanka et al., 2015) and not realize that they can be more of a resource if they become “active.” HR professionals can help them in this journey.

In general, it is important for one centralized unit to be thoughtful about all these different aspects of how allyship can be utilized in an organization. Collins and Chlup (2014) discussed the HR department as the best place for this to be centered. One reason this department can be especially well suited to develop and implement these programs is because of the power it has to enact organizational change and be a voice for minority populations, which is necessary for allyship to be effective (DeTurk, 2011; Sabat et al., 2013). Therefore, it is important for HR departments to be thoughtful about this topic and search out ways they can embrace it.

Limitations and Caveats to the Current Review

It should be noted that as this chapter sought to review previous research on the topic of allyship, there are a few limitations and caveats to heed. First, much of the discussion in this chapter was about allies to women, people of color, and the LGBTQ community. However, allies can (and should) support all minority communities, including those not extensively studied by previous research or mentioned here. Other minority groups not mentioned in this chapter that still receive

discrimination in the workplace include (but are not limited to) people with disabilities (Cheung et al., 2016), religious minorities (Ghumman, Ryan, Barclay, & Markel, 2013), and immigrants (Krings, Johnston, Binggeli, & Maggiori, 2014); these groups would also benefit from allyship.

Also, some people are minorities within minorities. For instance, women who are pregnant or breastfeeding at work may need extra support (Little, Hinojosa, Paustian-Underdahl, & Zipay, 2018); allies can be mindful of this. Intersectional approaches to studying diversity and inclusion suggest that practitioners and scholars will only gain a more nuanced and deeper understanding by examining the way in which multiple minority statuses intersect and influence each other (Sawyer, Salter, & Thoroughgood, 2013). Similarly, allyship should take a similar intersectional approach (Broido, 2000; Davis & Wagner, 2005; Reason & Broido, 2005; Reason, Scales, & Roosa Millar, 2005). Related, discussions of allyship need to be careful not to imply an ally can only support one minority community (i.e., a male who is just an ally “for women”); indeed, we are not arguing this here. Allies can be activists for social justice and support all minority communities (i.e., a male who is an ally “for all minorities”).

One final limitation of the current chapter is that most (but not all) of the research previously conducted on the topic has been done in Western countries; therefore, little research from other parts of the world is included here. This may result in a discussion of the topic that is more Western than global and therefore somewhat incomplete. That being said, as we noted in the beginning of this chapter, we argue that allyship can apply to every country; it is our hope that practitioners in every country will consider allyship (and scholars from countries not currently represented by allyship research will publish more on the topic).

Future Research

The area of allyship is also ripe for research. As noted in previous sections of this chapter, research on the specific outcomes of allyship is less prominent than research on allyship in general. More scientific evidence supporting this tool would be useful to practitioners as well as minority communities in general; evidence showing its effectiveness could help sway organizational leaders to invest the time and resources into allyship. Similarly, research exploring moderating factors and/or boundary conditions to its effectiveness would also be helpful. In what situations is allyship more or less effective? How far do the benefits of allyship extend? Future research should address all of these questions.

To complement research on the effectiveness of allyship, research should also examine best practices in ally training and development programs. Even if research suggests that allyship is a useful tool, it is less useful if there are no evidence-based methods of developing it in others. Research should study what types of programs are most effective at developing allies, and what are the key aspects of any program that should be included. Of course, research on the effectiveness of any program is difficult (because of the complexity of examining multiple concurrent aspects

involved in any change initiative), but practitioners and researchers should still explore this issue.

Also, as previously discussed, more research examining allies to other communities besides women, people of color, and the LGBTQ community is important (Broido, 2000; Davis & Wagner, 2005; Reason & Broido, 2005; Reason et al., 2005). It is likely that research on allies to one minority community (such as sexual minorities) may not translate exactly to other minority communities (such as people with disabilities), so the nuances and differences should be empirically explored. Also, ally research should not contribute to the silencing of other less-explored minority communities (such as those discussed above) by not including them in research. Ignoring these other communities in ally research may reinforce them being ignored by mainstream society, resulting in more negative effects for already disadvantaged groups.

Finally, as can be seen by our review of the previous research, research on allyship has a rich history of including both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. We echo this and encourage future researchers in the field to continue this tradition. There are advantages and disadvantages of course to both types of research, but allyship may be particularly well suited for qualitative research because of the highly personal and introspective nature of the experience. This does not mean quantitative methods should be excluded for ally research, but a balance of the two would be helpful.

Conclusion

Allyship is a topic that is beginning to receive more attention within organizations as well as from workplace scholars. We hope this trend continues and encourage it; allyship can be beneficial to the workplace, and it is the morally right thing to do. Although prejudice and discrimination still exist in societies across the world, everyone can take part in changing this culture. It is our hope that this chapter will inspire others to take up this cause within their organization.

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