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# Are allies who we think they are?: A comparative analysis

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## Abstract

Although dominant group allies have been increasingly studied by social psychologists interested in positive intergroup relations and the promotion of social justice, most of the existing research focuses on self-identified allies or dominant group individuals who are engaging in social justice activities. Little comparative work has examined white allies who were specifically identified as such by people of color. Two studies assessed qualities associated with affirming attitudes (low prejudice, high internal motivation to respond without prejudice, allophilia, and awareness of privilege) and informed action (activism) expected to be distinctively characteristic of allies. Nominated white allies in Study 1 had lower prejudice and higher levels of internal motivation to respond without prejudice than nonnominated white participants; this was replicated in Study 2, which compared nominated "allies" and "friends." In Study 2, nominated white allies rated themselves as lower on prejudice than nominated white friends. They also scored higher on internal motivation to respond without prejudice, understanding of white privilege, and activism than nominated white friends. There were no differences on self-reported allophilia between the two groups. Allies were rated by the people of color who nominated them as higher on qualities of outgroup affirmation and informed action than were nominated friends. Limitations of and implications for these findings are discussed.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

The 2016 U.S. Presidential campaign season revealed a level of racial (and other) animosity that was surprising to many white people in the United States. The rhetoric of the campaign and the ultimate election of Donald Trump as president also unleashed a desire, particularly among white liberals, to demonstrate support and solidarity with people of color and other members of marginalized groups in the United States (e.g., Thoet, 2016, para 2).<sup>1</sup> Online workshops designed to assist

white people to heal from the effects of toxic whiteness in order to fight more effectively for racial justice (<https://compassionateactivism.leadpages.co/workshop-healing-whiteness/>), and the Safety Pin Box, organized by Black women to provide resources "for white people striving to be allies in the fight for Black Liberation" ([www.safetypin-box.com](http://www.safetypin-box.com)), are but two examples of recently developed online resources specifically targeting those who want to be allies in the current political era.

What role can social psychology play in understanding members of dominant social groups who decide to commit themselves to supporting and working on behalf of the liberation of members of nondominant groups? What do we know about the unique characteristics of such allies? How can we apply what social psychologists know about allies to efforts to develop effective and meaningful alliances across differences of identity? The two studies presented in this paper represent an effort to identify potentially distinctive characteristics of allies, with the ultimate aim of encouraging individuals who want to work toward reducing social inequalities to cultivate these qualities.

<sup>1</sup>It is critical to note the substantial opposition to the safety pin campaign, especially from people of color who object to the relative passivity of the action, as well as to the idea that allies can be self-designated as such (see, e.g., <https://theestablishment.co/questioning-safety-pin-solidarity-revealed-why-i-cant-trust-white-people-263c39a5f69a>; [https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/11/18/go-ahead-wear-a-safety-pin-but-dont-expect-people-of-color-to-care/?utm\\_term=.fd1a7a6014bd](https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/11/18/go-ahead-wear-a-safety-pin-but-dont-expect-people-of-color-to-care/?utm_term=.fd1a7a6014bd)). The latter issue is an important one more generally among activists (and is in part what motivated us to focus on allies who were specifically nominated by people of color), as is the label "ally" (see <https://www.whiteaccomplices.org/> for a discussion of the concept of "accomplice" as a preferred way for white people to fight for racial justice)

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### 1.1 | Qualities of dominant group allies

In the last decade, consistent with a broader effort in social psychology to focus on positive intergroup relations in general (see Siem, Stürmer, & Pittinsky, 2016, for a recent review of this trend) and on racial tolerance in particular (e.g., Livingston & Drwecki, 2007), researchers have paid increasing attention to members of dominant groups who are allies to nondominant group members (e.g., Case, 2012; Droogendyk, Louis, & Wright, 2016; Fingerhut, 2011; Ostrove, Cole, & Oliva, 2009). Allies—members of dominant groups who build relationships with and take stands against the oppression of members of nondominant groups (Wijeyesinghe, Griffin, & Love, 1997)—possess qualities that distinguish them as not only relatively low on prejudice and relatively high on a willingness to understand their own privileged identity but also, as “ally activists” (Curtin, Kende, & Kende, 2016), to affiliate with and take action on behalf of the liberation of nondominant groups (see, e.g., Broido, 2000; Goodman, 2001; Mio, Barker, & Tumabling, 2009; Reason, Millar, & Scales, 2005; Washington & Evans, 1991). Our own work (Brown & Ostrove, 2013) demonstrated that people of color describe white allies as possessing two broad qualities: *affirmation* (communicating liking, caring, and respect) and *informed action* (demonstrating a willingness to be active on racial issues). The extant literature motivates specific hypotheses about the ways in which allies may be distinctive from individuals who are not allies, both in their affirming attitudes and motivations, and in their willingness to take informed action.

### 1.2 | Affirming attitudes and motivations

Because of their avowed opposition to oppression and discrimination, expressions of prejudice should be lower among allies than nonallies (Feagin & Vera, 2008; Gonzalez, Riggle, & Rostosky, 2015). Indeed, heterosexuals who engaged in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) activism had attitudes that were characterized by low levels of prejudice and high levels of positive feelings toward the outgroup (Fingerhut, 2011), and members of a gay-straight alliance demonstrated low levels of heterosexism and other measures that assess endorsement of prejudiced attitudes toward lesbians and gay men (Goldstein & Davis, 2010).

Not all manifestations of low prejudice are alike, however. Plant and Devine (1998) began their work excavating people’s motivations to react in nonprejudiced ways in the context of increasingly positive self-reported racial attitudes among white people. They differentiated empirically and conceptually independent “internal” from “external” motivations to respond without prejudice. People who are internally motivated to respond without prejudice do so out of their own personal values and convictions, whereas those who are externally motivated are concerned with avoiding others’ perceptions that they are discriminatory or racist. Across many studies, internal motivation to respond without prejudice among white people is associated with approach-related, as opposed to avoidance-related, behaviors and thus more smooth interracial interaction (Plant, Devine, & Peruche, 2010) and lower levels of intergroup anxiety (Plant & Devine, 2003). It is important to note that it is primarily internal, not external, motivation to respond without prejudice that strongly predicts intergroup attitudes and contact (see Kunstman, Plant, Zielaskowski, & LaCrosse, 2013, for a review).

We would thus expect allies to express motivation grounded in strongly-held personal values. Indeed, in her study of the underlying motivations of a large group of heterosexual allies who have consistently worked on behalf of LGBT rights, Russell (2011) found that allies were motivated primarily by fundamental principles and values (e.g., of justice, civil rights, religious conviction) and by their experiences in specific professional or personal roles vis à vis LGBT people (e.g., as educator, attorney, or family member).

The concept of “allophilia” has helped move the study of positive intergroup relations beyond manifestations of low prejudice toward active outgroup liking (see, e.g., Pittinsky & Montoya, 2009; Pittinsky, Rosenthal, & Montoya, 2011b). Allophilia denotes explicitly positive feelings toward an outgroup and is strongly associated with affirmative behaviors toward or on behalf of outgroup members (e.g., monetary contributions or socially risky interventions on behalf of the group; Pittinsky, Rosenthal, & Montoya, 2011a). In other research, allophilia was not only a strong predictor of heterosexual’s ally behavior and activism on behalf of LGBT individuals, but heterosexuals who were higher on allophilia were more likely to engage in ally behaviors when they were also lower in prejudice (Fingerhut, 2011). Recent work suggests that lessons for cultivating allophilia can be gleaned from the literature on allies and ally development (Gonzalez et al., 2015).

### 1.3 | Taking informed action

A thorough understanding of racism and white privilege is a necessary component of becoming an ally for racial justice (Case, Iuzzini, & Hopkins, 2012; Reason et al., 2005). Grounded in the expanding critical whiteness studies literature and in anti-racism efforts, privilege is defined as the unearned advantages afforded to members of socially dominant groups (see Case et al., 2012, for a recent review, and McIntosh, 1988, for now classic work outlining the concept and specific examples of white privilege). Awareness of privilege among dominant group members is associated with their taking action on behalf of nondominant group members. For example, awareness of heterosexual privilege was associated with lesbian and gay activism among heterosexual women (but not among men; Montgomery & Stewart, 2012); students who reflected on their own white privilege reported taking more action on behalf of racial justice (Reason et al., 2005). A qualitative study of antiracist activists revealed that an awareness of racism and white privilege motivated, and even necessitated, action among some of their participants (Smith & Redington, 2010).

Indeed, active engagement in efforts to promote social justice is inherent in the definition of allies for many theorists and researchers (see, e.g., Broido, 2000; Edwards, 2006). Although becoming a social justice ally requires positive attitudes toward outgroups and an awareness of privilege, “[u]ltimately the development of social justice allies must result in action that upsets the status quo” (Reason & Davis, 2005, p. 7). As noted throughout the empirical literature, allies take action on behalf of the causes and issues that face members of the groups to whom they are allied (e.g., Fingerhut, 2011; Grzanka, Adler, & Blazer, 2015; Montgomery & Stewart, 2012; Rosenblum & Travis, 2006).

Consistent with the emphasis on activism, recent work reviews the dangers inherent in positive intergroup relations that are characterized by low bias or outgroup liking *in the absence of supportive action*: an emphasis on harmonious intergroup relations can undermine disadvantaged group members' efforts at taking collective action (Droogendyk et al., 2016). Disadvantaged group members were more motivated toward political action on behalf of their own group when dominant group members show "supportive contact"—"friendly cross-group contact in which the advantaged group member demonstrates personal engagement in opposing inequality and/or supporting social change" (p. 318). Supportive contact, then, appears to include both affirmation (expressions of caring and respect) and informed action (engaged activism; Brown & Ostrove, 2013).

## 1.4 | The current study

Although the empirical literature suggests that allies possess key behavioral and attitudinal characteristics associated with affirmation and informed action, very little of it examines allies who were actually identified by the people in the target group with whom they are allied (see, however, Livingston and Drwecki's [2007] study of nonbiased White people, some of whom were nominated by an African American acquaintance; see also Brown and Ostrove [2013] for a discussion of the importance of studying allies from the perspective of nondominant group members). In addition, very little work directly compares allies and nonallies. This kind of explicitly comparative work is critical to assessing the potential uniqueness of allies in the context of intergroup relations and social change. Understanding the distinguishing features of allies can help us develop strategies for cultivating effective allies and, ultimately, redressing social inequality.

In both studies presented in this paper, "allies" were defined as individuals with whom participants of color felt comfortable and on whom they could count if they experienced racial/ethnic misunderstandings. The first study compared white individuals who were nominated as allies by people of color to white individuals who were not nominated by people of color, and focused on qualities associated with *affirmation*: low prejudice and internal motivation to respond without prejudice; the second study replicates and extends the first to address additional aspects of affirmation (allophilia) as well as measures of *informed action* (awareness of privilege and activism) in a more clearly comparative manner by assessing these qualities among white allies and white friends, all of whom were nominated by people of color. Study 2 also explicitly assesses whether people of color themselves rate allies and friends differently on *affirmation* and *informed action*.

## 2 | STUDY 1

Based on previous work grounded in the literature identifying low prejudice and value-based motivations among allies, our first study tested two hypotheses: (a) nominated white allies will exhibit lower anti-people of color and higher pro-people of color attitudes than nonnominated white people; (b) nominated white allies will score significantly higher on internal motivation to respond without prejudice than non-nominated white people.

## 2.1 | Method

### 2.1.1 | Participants

One hundred ninety people participated in this study. Fifty-one were recruited during data collection in Brown and Ostrove's (2013) study of people of color's perceptions of allies, in which we asked the people of color in those studies if they would be willing to provide us with an email address for the white person about whom they had answered the questions in that study (someone with whom they felt comfortable and on whom they could count if they experienced racial/ethnic misunderstandings). The 51 people who agreed to participate represent 79.69% of the original pool of potential participants. Seven participants were eliminated from the analyses because the person who nominated them for the study was someone with whom they were in a romantic relationship. One participant identified as bi-racial and was also removed from all analyses. Our final sample of nominated white allies included 43 participants.

The remaining participants were recruited from a randomly generated list of 229 white students<sup>2</sup> attending the same Midwestern liberal arts college from which we obtained participants of color in Brown and Ostrove (2013). Research assistants eliminated the names of the three people on this list who were also on the list of nominated white allies. Of the remaining students on the list, 61.7% agreed to participate in the study. Our final sample of nonnominated white participants included 139 individuals.

The two samples were quite similar with respect to gender, sexual orientation, and social class background. Table 1 describes demographic characteristics of participants.

All of the potential participants were sent an email with a link to an online survey. Nominated participants were told that they were being asked to participate in the study "because one of your friends identified you as a person with whom s/he is close." All participants were assured of complete confidentiality and anonymity and were entered into a drawing to win prizes as incentive for their participation.

### 2.1.2 | Measures

#### Prejudice

We adapted Katz and Hass's (1988) Pro- and Anti-Black Attitudes scales by replacing "Black" with "people of color" and created a 7-item pro-people of color (e.g., "People of color do not have the same employment opportunities that Whites do") and 7-item anti-people of color (e.g., "On the whole, people of color don't stress education and training") scale. Participants responded to items on a 9-point scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," resulting in scales with higher numbers corresponding to either a greater pro- or anti-people of color attitude. Both scales had adequate inter-item reliabilities ( $\alpha_{\text{pro-people of color}} = .73$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{anti-people of color}} = .70$ ).

#### Motivation

Plant and Devine's (1998) Motivation to Respond without Prejudice Scale consists of 10 items, five of which assess internal motivation to

<sup>2</sup>We obtained a list of 250 white students, but 21 students never received our initial communication because our emails were automatically returned.

TABLE 1 Demographic characteristics of samples

	Study 1			Study 2		
	Nominated	Nonnominated	t	Ally	Friend	t
Gender <sup>a</sup>						
Women	28	84		42	19	
Men	19	51		13	10	
			$\chi^2 = 0.10, ns$			$\chi^2 = 1.12, ns$
Sexual orientation						
Heterosexual	38	115		40	22	
LGBTQU	5	13		16	7	
			$\chi^2 = 0.07, ns$			$\chi^2 = .10, ns$
Social class						
Mother's ed <sup>b</sup>	4.32	4.54	$t = 1.23, ns$	4.48	4.03	$t = 1.76^+$
Father's ed <sup>b</sup>	4.30	4.78	$t = 2.34^*$	4.63	4.33	$t = 1.01, ns$
Self-report <sup>c</sup>	4.13	4.32	$t = 1.25, ns$	4.37	4.27	$t = 0.43, ns$

<sup>a</sup>One participant in Study 2 identified as genderqueer.

<sup>b</sup>Range for parental education: 1 = less than high school to 6 = completed doctoral level degree.

<sup>c</sup>Range for self-reported social class status: 1 = poor to 6 = upper class.

<sup>+</sup> $p < .10$ . \* $p < .05$ .

respond without prejudice (IMS; e.g., "I attempt to act in nonprejudiced ways toward Black people because it is personally important to me" and "Because of my personal values, I believe that using stereotypes about Black people is wrong"). All references to "Black people" in the original measure were changed to "people of color." Participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with each item on a 9-point scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," with higher scores indicating greater internal motivation. In the current sample, the IMS scale had an acceptable reliability coefficient ( $\alpha = .84$ ).

## 2.2 | Results

We conducted *t*-tests to compare nominated white allies and nonnominated white participants on three DVs: Pro-People of Color attitudes, Anti-People of Color attitudes, and Internal Motivation to Respond without Prejudice. Nominated white allies rated themselves significantly higher on Pro-People of Color attitudes and on Internal Motivation to Respond without Prejudice, and marginally significantly lower ( $p = .06$ ) on Anti-People of Color attitudes, than nonnominated white participants (see Table 2 for means, standard deviations, *t* values, and effect sizes).

## 2.3 | Discussion

Comparing data provided by white people who were specifically nominated as allies by people of color to those from a sample of nonnominated white people, Study 1 provides evidence for some key characteristics that differentiate those who are specifically nominated as allies from those who are not. Consistent with expectations, we found that white allies were marginally less likely to exhibit anti-person of color attitudes, more likely to exhibit pro-person of color attitudes, and to have higher levels of internal motivation to respond without prejudice than were nonnominated white people.

Although these are important findings toward establishing an empirical basis for characteristics that may be specific to allies, Study 1 did not allow us to compare the two groups on ally features that make them distinctive from internally motivated nonprejudiced individuals in general. In addition to being low on prejudice and high on an internal motivation to be nonprejudiced, we would expect allies to be distinctive in other ways, especially by expressing additional qualities associated with *both affirmation and informed action* (Brown & Ostrove, 2013). Noncomparative research on heterosexual allies to LGBT individuals and on white allies to people of color suggests that allies explicitly like outgroup members (e.g., Fingerhut, 2011), demonstrate an

TABLE 2 T-test comparisons of nominated white allies and nonnominated white participants: Study 1

Scale	Nominated white participants <i>X</i> ( <i>SD</i> , <i>n</i> )	Nonnominated white participants <i>X</i> ( <i>SD</i> , <i>n</i> )	<i>t</i>	Effect size (Cohen's <i>d</i> )	95% CI of difference
Pro-people of color attitudes	6.55 (1.67, 43)	6.14 (1.16, 126)	1.94*	0.29	[-.01, .82]
Anti-people of color attitudes	3.21 (1.05, 45)	3.59 (1.14, 126)	1.92 <sup>+</sup>	0.35	[-.75, .01]
Internal motivation to respond without prejudice	8.36 (.94, 45)	7.61 (1.41, 120)	3.91**	0.63	[.37, 1.12]

<sup>+</sup> $p < .10$ . \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

understanding and awareness of their own privilege (e.g., Curtin et al., 2016; Edwards, 2006), and take action on behalf of marginalized groups (e.g., Case, 2012).

We also note that our nonnominated samples in Study 1 may not have been comprised solely of nonallies. That is, our nonnominated sample could have included individuals who are key allies to people of color in the effort to end racism, even if they were not allies to the people of color who nominated the white allies in our study. For Study 2, therefore, we developed a sample of white allies and white friends, *both of whom* were nominated by people of color.

### 3 | STUDY 2

Our second study alleviates a significant drawback of our first study: both allies and nonallies were nominated by people of color. We asked students of color to think and answer questions about, and provide contact information for, someone they considered an “ally” (described as a White person with whom they were not romantically involved, who makes them feel comfortable, who understands what they experience, who treats them well, and on whose support they are *certain* they could count if they experienced a race-related problem or misunderstanding) and someone they considered a “friend” (described as a White person who is a friend with whom they are not romantically involved, and on whose support they are *not certain* they could count if they experience a race-related problem or misunderstanding).

As noted above, we (Brown & Ostrove, 2013) found that people of color’s characterization of allies were represented by two broad themes: affirmation (showing care and respect for people of color) and informed action (taking action among white people to address racism and being involved with issues relevant to people of color). Study 1 provided us with some evidence that nominated white allies demonstrate more “affirmative” qualities than nonnominated individuals, at least with respect to prejudice and motivation to respond without prejudice. In Study 2, we also expected that nominated white allies would demonstrate lower levels of prejudice and higher levels of internal motivation to respond without prejudice than would nominated white friends. We extended our examination of affirmation characteristics in Study 2 to include outgroup liking (allophilia) and expected nominated white allies to report higher levels of allophilia than nominated white friends. Study 2 also includes an examination of characteristics associated with “informed action:” understanding of white privilege and activism. On both of these variables, we expected nominated white allies to score higher than nominated white friends. Finally, Study 2 also allowed us to compare allies and friends on ratings of affirmation and informed action that were made *by the people of color who nominated them*. We expected that allies would receive higher scores on affirmation and informed action than would friends.

### 3.1 | Method

#### 3.1.1 | Participants

The primary sample for this study was comprised of white individuals who were nominated as either “friends” or “allies” by students of color

at a small Midwestern liberal arts college. The *nominating sample* included 261 students of color, all of whom received \$5 in “auxiliary points” that could be used at various shops and restaurants on and off campus.

We asked the students of color to complete a brief questionnaire about, and to provide us with an email address for, two different individuals: a white person whom they considered to be an “ally” (described as a White person with whom they were not romantically involved, who makes them feel comfortable, who understands what they experience, who treats them well, and on whose support they are *certain* they could count if they experienced a race-related problem or misunderstanding) *and* one whom they considered a “friend” (described as a White person who is a friend with whom they are not romantically involved, and on whose support they are *not certain* they could count if they experience a race-related problem or misunderstanding).

The students of color provided contact information for 147 allies and 96 friends. Of the 147 allies, six were eliminated because they were staff, faculty, or family members of the nominators. One was eliminated because the nominated individual identified as a person of color. We successfully delivered email invitations with a link to our survey to 138 of the nominated white *allies*, and received 81 surveys (for a response rate of 59%). We successfully delivered email invitations to 91 of the nominated white *friends*, and received 41 surveys (for a response rate of 45%).<sup>3</sup> Demographic characteristics of the allies and friends are provided in Table 1; nominated allies and friends were quite similar with respect to gender, sexual orientation, and social class background.

All participants who provided us with an email address with their completed survey received \$5 worth of “auxiliary points” redeemable at campus and off-campus shops and restaurants.

#### 3.1.2 | Measures

##### Measures completed by white nominees

**Prejudice** Prejudice, assessed by anti- and pro-people of color attitudes, was assessed in the same way as in Study 1. Both scales had adequate inter-item reliabilities ( $\alpha_{\text{pro-people of color}} = .77$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{anti-people of color}} = .80$ ).

**Motivation** Internal motivation to respond without prejudice (IMS) was assessed in the same way as in Study 1. The scale had adequate internal consistency in the current sample ( $\alpha = .78$ ).

**Outgroup liking** Positive feelings toward and liking of people of color was assessed with Pittinsky, Rosenthal, and Montoya’s (2011b) Allophilia Scale. Participants indicated the extent of their agreement with 17 items (e.g., “I am interested in hearing about the experiences of people of color” “I am enthusiastic about people of color” and “I am at ease around people of color”) using a 9-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 9 = *strongly agree*). The Allophilia scale was highly reliable in this sample ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

<sup>3</sup>Of those who participated and for whom we had sufficient data, three allies were nominated by two different students of color, and one friend was nominated by two different students of color.

TABLE 3 T-test comparisons of nominated white allies and nominated white friends: Study 2

Scale	Nominated white allies X (SD, n)	Nominated white friends X (SD, n)	t	Effect size (Cohen's d)	95% CI of difference
Pro-people of color attitudes	7.23 (.95, 66)	6.75 (1.28, 36)	2.43 <sup>*</sup>	0.48	[.10, .99]
Anti-people of color attitudes	2.96 (1.17, 66)	3.55 (1.39, 36)	-2.16 <sup>*</sup>	0.46	[-1.10, -.07]
Internal motivation to respond without prejudice	8.21 (1.01, 62)	7.74 (1.32, 34)	1.95 <sup>*</sup>	0.40	[.01, .95]
Activism	4.66 (1.56, 66)	3.91 (1.41, 36)	2.37 <sup>*</sup>	0.50	[.12, 1.36]
Allophilia	7.18 (.99, 61)	7.05 (1.10, 34)	.60	0.12	[-.31, .57]

\* $p \leq .05$ .

**Privilege** Participants completed Pinterits, Poteat, and Spanierman's (2009) 28-item White Privilege Attitudes Scale. The scale consists of four subscales (Willingness to Confront White Privilege [e.g., "I plan to work to change our unfair social structure that promotes White privilege"], Anticipated Costs of Addressing White Privilege [e.g., "If I were to speak up against White privilege, I would fear losing my friends"], White Privilege Awareness [e.g., "White people have it easier than people of color"], and White Privilege Remorse [e.g., "I am ashamed that the system is stacked in my favor because I am White"]. Participants indicated the extent of their agreement with each statement on a 9-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 9 = *strongly agree*). Each subscale had adequate internal consistency in our sample ( $\alpha_{\text{willingness to confront}} = .94$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{anticipated costs}} = .85$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{awareness}} = .81$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{remorse}} = .90$ ).

**Activism** We adapted Szymanski's (2004, 2012) Involvement in Feminist Activism Scale to assess participants' engagement and action on behalf of racial issues. Participants rated the extent to which 17 statements were true of them on a nine-point scale (1 = *very untrue of me* to 9 = *very true of me*). Sample statements include "I donate money to groups or causes addressing racial issues;" "I am involved in antiracist work;" "I attend conferences/lectures/classes/training addressing racial issues;" and "I am a member of one or more organizations and/or groups addressing racial issues." The Cronbach's alpha for this scale in the current sample was .90.

#### Measures completed by people of color nominators

**Perceptions of allies** The Perception of Ally Characteristics Scale (PACS) was developed by Brown and Ostrove (2013) to assess the characteristics of outgroup allies from the perspective of nondominant group members. The PACS consists of two subscales: affirmation (e.g., creating a feeling of connection) and informed action (e.g., taking action to address bias in one's own racial group). The PACS-Affirmation subscale consisted of 4 items [e.g., this person "is respectful toward me"], with responses ranging from 1 (not at all characteristic) to 9 (very characteristic). The PACS-Informed Action subscale focused on behaviors that indicate that an outgroup individual displayed awareness of social differences and inequalities in behaviors perceived by nondominant group people. This PACS subscale included 6 items [e.g., this person "is active in racial/ethnic communities other than his or her own"], with responses ranging from 1 (not at all characteristic) to 9 (very

characteristic). Our nominating sample of students of color rated both "friends" and "allies" on the PACS. Reliability was adequate for the two subscales (for ratings of both friends and of allies: PACS-Informed action [friends  $\alpha = .80$ ; allies  $\alpha = .78$ ]; PACS-Affirmation [friends  $\alpha = .87$ ; allies  $\alpha = .76$ ]).

## 3.2 | Results

### 3.2.1 | Nominated white allies' and friends' self-ratings

We conducted *t*-tests with Pro-People of Color attitudes, Anti-People of Color attitudes, Internal Motivation to Respond without Prejudice, Allophilia, and Activism as dependent variables and nominated ally status (ally or friend) as the independent variable. As predicted, allies rated themselves higher on pro-people of color attitudes, internal motivation to respond without prejudice, and activism than friends; they rated themselves lower on anti-people of color attitudes than friends. There were no significant differences between allies and friends on self-rated allophilia. (See Table 3 for all means, SDs, *t* values, effect sizes, and confidence intervals.)

Because the four Privilege scales assessed one underlying construct, as recommended by Huberty and Morris (1989) we conducted a MANOVA with the four Privilege scales as the DVs and nominated ally status (ally or friend) as the independent variable. The MANOVA indicated a significant relationship for ally status [*Wilk's*  $\lambda = .89$ ,  $F(4, 82) = 2.50$ ,  $p = .048$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .11$ ]. Univariate tests revealed that nominated white allies scored higher on willingness to confront white privilege,  $F(1, 85) = 9.09$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .097$ , awareness of white privilege,  $F(1, 85) = 7.41$ ,  $p = .008$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .08$ , and remorse related to white privilege,  $F(1, 85) = 4.18$ ,  $p = .04$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .05$ , than nominated white friends; allies and friends did not differ in their assessment of the anticipated costs of confronting white privilege,  $F(1, 85) = 0.15$ ,  $p = .70$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .002$  (see Table 4 for means and standard error values).

### 3.2.2 | Perception of allies by nominators of color

We compared nominated friends and nominated allies who participated in our survey on their scores on the two subscales of the Perception of Ally Characteristics Scale as rated by the student of color nominators. We averaged the ally ratings for the four nominated participants who were nominated by more than one student of color. The nominated

TABLE 4 Means and standard errors for MANOVA: Study 2

White privilege attitudes scale	Nominated white allies (X, SE)	Nominated white friends (X, SE)
Willingness to confront white privilege**	6.92 (.19)	5.92 (.27)
Anticipated costs of addressing white privilege**	4.07 (.22)	3.92 (.31)
White privilege awareness	8.09 (.16)	7.37 (.21)
White privilege remorse <sup>†</sup>	5.51 (.23)	4.73 (.31)

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

allies ( $n = 52$ ) in this study were rated as higher on both Affirmation ( $M = 8.52$ ,  $SD = .63$ ) and on Informed Action ( $M = 6.42$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ) than were nominated friends ( $n = 22$ ;  $M_{\text{Affirmation}} = 6.68$ ,  $SD = 1.58$  [ $t(24) = 5.28$ ,  $p = .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.53$ , 95% CI [1.11, 2.56];  $M_{\text{InformedAction}} = 4.24$ ,  $SD = 1.72$  [ $t(72) = 5.72$ ,  $p = .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.39$ , 95% CI [1.42, 2.94]]) (see Figure 1).<sup>4</sup>

### 3.3 | Discussion

As we expected, nominated allies rated themselves higher than nominated friends on key affirmation-related qualities (prejudice and motivation to respond without prejudice) and on characteristics related to informed action (awareness of privilege and activism). Contrary to our expectations, however, the two groups did not differ on self-reports of allophilia. Although we expected allies to have stronger levels of outgroup liking than friends, it is not entirely surprising that nominated friends would have equally high levels of outgroup liking as nominated allies did. Given work that suggests that people of color value being respected more than being liked in both imagined and real interracial contact situations (Bergsieker, Shelton, & Richeson, 2010), it seems possible that respect is more important than liking in the ally relationship. A post hoc analysis of one respect-related item on the Allophilia scale ("I respect people of color") suggests that nominated allies ( $M = 8.39$ ) rated themselves higher than nominated friends ( $M = 8.18$ ), but this difference was not significant ( $t[93] = 0.85$ , n.s.). Future work in this area should prioritize the issue of respect over liking in distinguishing allies from friends.

We also found that students of color rated their allies higher than their friends on *both* action *and* affirmation. It appears that some

<sup>4</sup>Given the discrepancy in the number of ally and friend contact information we received from people of color nominators, the differential response rates from the two groups, as well as the fact that only about 75% of the white participants provided us with an email to receive AUX points by which we could match them to their nominator, we had data for only 11 pairs of allies and friends who were nominated by the same person of color. A paired  $t$ -test of this very small sample revealed the same pattern as reported in the Results section: allies were rated higher on informed action ( $X = 6.91$ ) than were friends ( $X = 3.71$ ;  $t(10) = 4.03$ ,  $p = .002$ ); they were rated marginally higher on affirmation ( $X = 8.52$ ) than were friends ( $X = 6.68$ ;  $t(10) = 2.00$ ,  $p = .07$ ). Self-report ratings from the 11 pairs on the DVs we assessed in Study 2 also reveal the same pattern of findings as reported above.

inextricable combination of caring/respect and willingness to work for social change is distinctive to allies. Because our sample of nominated friends and allies did not differ in their self-rated levels of allophilia, however, while they did differ on prejudice and internal motivation to respond without prejudice as well as on awareness of privilege and activism, this particular combination of caring/respect and active commitment that emerges in the ratings of the people of color who nominated our Study 2 participants deserves further exploration.

## 4 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

Because our samples of allies were specifically nominated by people of color, and because we offer an explicitly comparative analysis, our work offers an important contribution to the growing literature on allies. We empirically demonstrated that dominant group allies exhibit characteristics of both *affirmation* and *informed action* (Brown & Ostrove, 2013) in a way that distinguishes them from nonnominated white people and from nominated white friends. Using a different construct to understand our findings, allies appear to demonstrate "supportive contact"—they are friendly, respectful, and caring toward nondominant group members, and also oppose inequality or support efforts toward social change (Droogendyk et al., 2016).

In Study 1, nominated white allies were lower on prejudice and more strongly motivated by personal values to act in nonprejudiced ways toward people of color than nonnominated white people. When we compared allies and friends who were both nominated by people of color in Study 2, we replicated those findings, but did not extend them to include another aspect of affirmation: allophilia. Nominated allies and friends did not rate themselves differently on this measure of outgroup liking, although their people of color nominators rated allies higher than friends on a scale of *affirmation* (that included qualities of caring, respect, and connection). As noted above, it may be the respect dimension of affirmation that is critical here, rather than the liking or caring dimension (Bergsieker et al., 2010). People of color nominators also rated their allies higher than their friends on *informed action*. This distinction was also evident in ally and friend self-ratings: allies scored higher than friends on measures of white privilege awareness and activism.

Although our studies offer an important comparative picture and provide empirical support for the idea that allies possess key

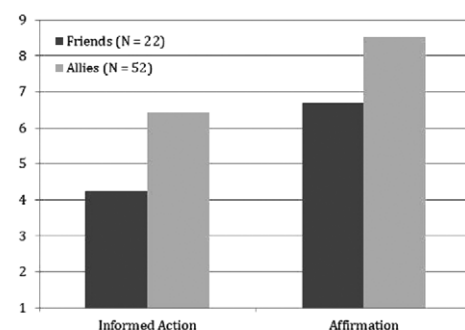


FIGURE 1 People of color's ratings of nominated friends and allies on perception of ally characteristics scale (Study 2)



characteristics related to affirmation and informed action, our work has limitations that should be addressed in future research. Study 2 identified a category of friends who are not allies, but it is clear that our sample of allies also qualifies as “friends.” Indeed, it may be quite difficult to separate “friends” and “allies” given the combination of affirming qualities (caring, liking, and respect) and commitment to activism people of color identify in those they consider “allies” (see Brown, 2015, for additional empirical evidence on the challenge of separating friends and allies in work that distinguished among people of color’s perceptions of “friends,” “allies,” and “activists”). The design of our study, which asked people of color to think of individuals with whom they have a personal connection, was a strength because we can be sure that our participants are not self-proclaimed allies but are identified as such by people of color. It does, however, present two important and interrelated challenges: it makes it extremely difficult to determine whether or not an ally can be someone who is not also a friend, and it does not address the possibility that one can be a dominant-group ally without having personal relationships with members of the relevant nondominant group with which one is allied (most, but not all, definitions of “ally” include an interpersonal dimension; see Gonzalez et al., 2015).

Our samples were generated among students at one private liberal arts college in the Midwestern United States; future research should replicate and extend these findings in larger, more attitudinally diverse, and more representative samples. In addition, due to low numbers, we were unable to assess the role of gender in distinguishing nominated allies from nonnominated white individuals or nominated friends. Post hoc analyses with small *N*s in Study 2, which we interpret with considerable caution, suggest that there was neither a main effect of gender nor an interaction of gender and nominated status on activism. There was, however, a main effect of gender on allophilia, such that women’s scores were significantly higher than men’s (there was no interaction of gender and nominated status, not surprisingly, given that self-ratings of allophilia did not distinguish allies from friends in our sample). Given previous research that suggests that women are more likely to be allies and activists than men (e.g., Fingerhut, 2011, and Montgomery & Stewart, 2012; for evidence of the ways in which sexism in the form of self-objectification thwarts women’s engagement in social justice activism, however, see Calogero, 2013), future research should investigate the ways in which gender (and other social status variables such as social class or sexual orientation) interacts with ally status to distinguish allies from nonallies. Curtin et al. (2016), using interview data from activists in Hungary and the United States, found that nondominant social status in one domain motivated becoming an ally in a (different) domain in which one is a member of dominant group. This topic warrants considerable further exploration.

Finally, despite the contribution this work makes to identifying potentially unique features of allies, it does little to explicate the processes by which allies come to develop these characteristics (Gonzalez et al., 2015). The concept of recategorization (Dovidio, Gaertner, Validzic, & Matoka, 1997; Fingerhut, 2011), by which members of different social identity groups build connection around a shared superordinate identity, might help explain how alliances form between

members of different social identity groups (note, however, that coming to share a superordinate identity may also undermine a recognition of group inequality; see, e.g., Banfield & Dovidio, 2013; Dixon, Durrheim, Kerr, & Thomae, 2013). Recent and extensive qualitative analysis of both in-group and ally activism (Curtin et al., 2016) suggests that being a member of a disadvantaged group (even if it is not one for which one is engaging in activism), experiences that illuminate one’s own privilege, and—perhaps most critically—engaging in activism before taking on the activist/ally activist identity are key factors that facilitate becoming an ally. Understanding these processes further could help identify strategies for cultivating allies and promoting social and political change.

Other recent work on allies (Droogendyk et al., 2016) highlights the importance of attending to the challenges associated with ally relationships: although advantaged group allies’ activism may serve to empower some disadvantaged group members, it can also offer dependency-oriented help (see Nadler & Halabi, 2006), co-opt the identities of disadvantaged group members, or take over the goals and agenda of the disadvantaged group. Droogendyk et al.’s work underscores the importance of allies attending to their own privileged status and position; we agree that attention to identity, positionality, and privilege among allies is critical, and our work offers empirical evidence that white allies who were nominated by people of color do indeed exhibit higher levels of awareness of privilege than white people who were nominated by people of color as friends. Further work with more diverse (and less “liberal”) samples and more nuanced measures of privilege is critical.

Despite these limitations, our studies offer an important contribution to the burgeoning literature on allies. Unique features of our studies include that our sample of allies was specifically nominated by people of color, and that our work was explicitly comparative. We compared our nominated ally samples to (in Study 1) a group of nonnominated white participants and (in Study 2) to a sample of nominated white friends. Our work suggests the importance of both affirmation and informed action (Brown & Ostrove, 2013), and of supportive contact (friendly intergroup contact that is accompanied by a clear willingness to take action against oppression; Droogendyk et al., 2016). Low levels of prejudice, internal motivation to respond without prejudice, awareness of privilege, and activism are critical and potentially distinctive characteristics of white allies who are committed to the well-being and liberation of people of color. Perhaps now more than ever, we must find ways to cultivate these characteristics among larger numbers of people.

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