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Who's Expected to be an Ally? An Examination of Allyship and Leadership Evaluations for Racial Minority and White Leaders

McKenzie Preston
University of Pennsylvania, mpresto@wharton.upenn.edu

Angelica Leigh
Duke University, angelica.leigh@duke.edu

Terrence L. Boyd
Louisiana State University, tboyd15@lsu.edu

Richard Burgess
University of Toronto, richard_burgess@kenan-flagler.unc.edu

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Leaders' structural and referent power makes them well-positioned to be allies. Allies are characterized as individuals who are members of advantaged groups that engage in actions to improve the status of disadvantage groups (Louis et al., 2019). While this characterization does not preclude the possibility that non-dominant group individuals (e.g. racial minorities) can be allies, most research examining allyship has focused on dominant group members as allies (e.g Radke, Kutlaca, Siem, Wright, & Becker, 2020). We seek to extend the limited research on racial minorities engaging in diversity work (Hekman, Johnson, Foo, & Yang, 2017; Saguy, Fernández, Branscombe, & Shany, 2020) and research on allyship by examining allyship and leadership evaluations based on a number of factors: leader race, the decision to speak up or remain silent on a diversity issue, and whether this behavior is targeted toward the leader's own or another racial group.

Drawing on expectancy violation theory (Burgoon & Jones, 1976) we suggest that evaluators have different predictive (i.e., what leaders will *likely* do) and prescriptive (i.e., what leaders *should* do) allyship expectations based on a leader's race. Specifically, we suggest that there are predictive expectations that racial minority leaders are committed to helping their *own* racial group, however, these expectations do not extend to advocacy directed at *other* racial groups. Thus, when racial minorities speak up on behalf of a racially dissimilar group, their allyship behaviors are viewed favorably and similarly to that of White leader allies. We also suggest that current attention to issues of diversity has created a prescriptive expectation that White leaders should be allies, hence White leaders are evaluated negatively when they remain silent on diversity issues. However, because racial minority leaders do not have this same prescriptive expectation, perceptions of their allyship are not reduced when they remain silent on diversity issues. Finally, we propose that these differing perceptions of allyship are important because as perceptions of allyship increase so too does evaluations of leader effectiveness.

We conducted an initial study with 470 employees (50% women, 49% men, 1% non-binary; 89% White, 4% Black, 5% Asian, 2% other race; mean age = 35, average work experience = 14.34) on Prolific that supports these predictions. We manipulated leader race using photos and speaking up behaviors through a vignette where the leader either spoke up on behalf of Black employees or decided to remain silent. We found two significant two-way interactions, such that in the voice condition, White ($M = 4.07$, $SD = .10$) and Asian leaders ($M = 4.05$, $SD = .10$) were seen as significantly higher in allyship compared to Black leaders ($M = 3.44$, $SD = .10$) $b = -1.06$, $p < .001$). Whereas in the silence condition, Black ($M = 3.57$, $SD = .10$) and Asian ($M = 3.58$, $SD = .10$) leaders were viewed as significantly higher in allyship than the White leader ($M = 3.14$, $SD= .10$, $b = -0.46$, $p = .02$). We also found significant moderated-mediation, such that within the voice condition, the indirect effect of race on leader effectiveness through allyship was positive and significant for both Asian (estimate = 0.37, $SE = .09$, 95% C.I. [0.19,0.55]) and White leaders (estimate = 0.38, $SE = .09$, 95% C.I. [0.21,0.57]) compared to Black leaders. Additionally, within the silence condition this indirect effect was positive but non-significant for Asian leaders (estimate = 0.01, $SE = .08$, 95% C.I. [-0.14, 0.15]) and negative and significant for

White leaders (estimate = -0.26, *SE* = .09, 95% C.I. [-0.44, -0.09]) compared to Black leaders. These results suggest that when compared to Black leaders that speak up for Black employees, Asian and White leaders are viewed as better allies and more effective leaders. However, when leaders decide to remain silent on issues related to Black employees, perceptions of White leaders' allyship and leadership effectiveness are reduced compared to Black and Asian leaders.

In a subsequent pre-registered study, we replicated these findings using Asian employees as the target group of allyship. In future studies, we plan to directly test the mediating effects of prescriptive and predictive expectations for allyship on leadership evaluations and expand our dependent variables to other leadership evaluations (e.g., inclusive leadership). Overall, it is our hope that our paper broadens current conceptions of allyship by demonstrating that racial minority leaders are indeed allies, and that the expectations and evaluations of allies in leadership roles differ based on their race.

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