

Study explores role of white allyship on self-esteem of marginalized group members

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In recent years, many Americans have begun to rethink their views on racial justice and the prejudice that exists within our country. But as white Americans confront others who are spewing prejudice, how does that impact Black Americans?

New research by Indiana University (IUPUI)'s Leslie Ashburn-Nardo

and former IUPUI student Charles Chu, now an assistant professor at Boston University, investigated these perceptions. During two experiments, they found that Black participants reported higher levels of self-esteem after a white ally confronted a white perpetrator of [racial prejudice](#) compared to no confrontation. However, the white person's [motivations](#) for standing up against prejudice in the first place had an impact on the Black person's self-esteem.

The study was published in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*.

The researchers said popular discourse and research on allyship—actions that advantaged group members can take to improve the treatment or circumstances of a marginalized group—have grown in recent years. However, this study, they say, provides the first demonstration of the effect of a white ally confrontation on Black perceivers' psychological well-being, or self-esteem.

"People from advantaged groups must call out prejudice because it will help empower people from marginalized groups," said Ashburn-Nardo, a professor of psychology in the School of Science. "However, their motivations for doing so, and especially whether those motivations are viewed suspiciously or not, play a big role in the well-being of Black perceivers."

The researchers observed more of a positive impact on Black participants' [self-esteem](#) when they perceived the ally confrontation as more genuine or intrinsically-motivated. A white person saying that an anti-Black remark isn't okay because it violates their personal beliefs and values was more beneficial to Black perceivers than saying the remark isn't okay because it can upset other people.

This research can offer practical implications for white allies in the

[workplace](#) and within American society, the researchers said.

"Now more than ever, it is so important to have allies speak out against prejudices being experienced by their friends, co-workers or others from marginalized groups," Ashburn-Nardo said. "For a variety of reasons, white people all too often do not speak out when they witness racial injustice, but that unfairly puts the burden of confronting on the targets of prejudice themselves. Our findings clearly demonstrate that [confrontation](#), particularly when it is motivated by personal values of fairness and equity, is something white allies can do to improve the well-being of Black targets of prejudice."

More information: Charles Chu et al, Black Americans' perspectives on ally confrontations of racial prejudice, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jesp.2022.104337](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2022.104337)

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