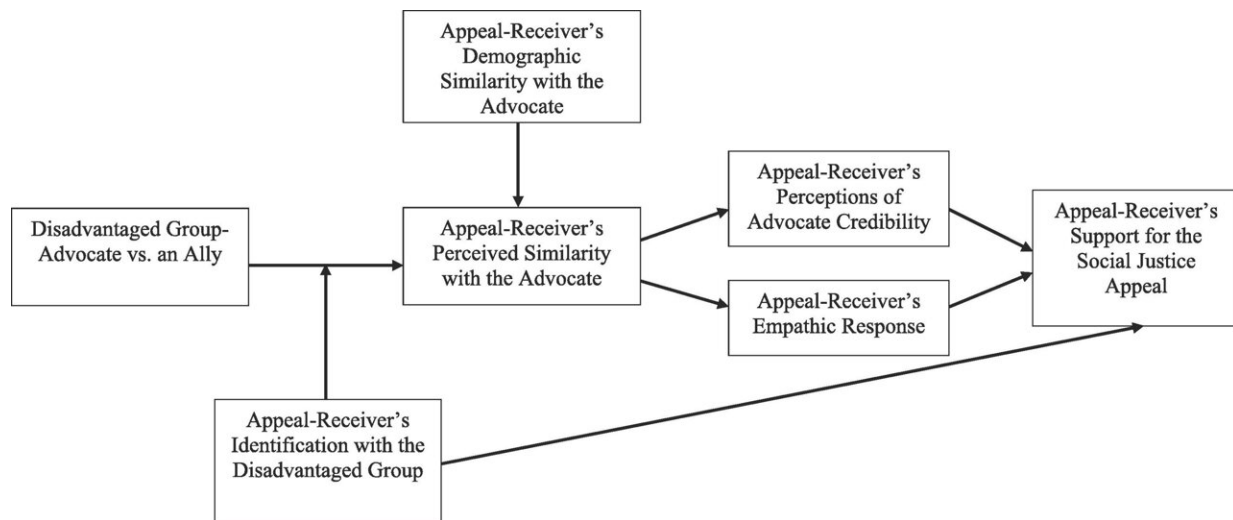


Study examines factors for effective social justice advocacy in the workplace

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Theoretical model of when, and why, a disadvantaged group-advocate (rather than an ally) generates more justice appeal-support. Credit: *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* (2024). DOI: 10.1016/j.obhdp.2024.104332

Fighting for social justice often takes root in the workplace—evidenced when there is advocacy for pay equity, diversity and inclusion, and similar initiatives. But to ensure that this advocacy is effective, who should be doing the advocating?

Debra Shapiro at the University of Maryland's Robert H. Smith School

of Business has co-authored research that answers this question. "Social justice movements aren't going away anytime soon because they're needed," she says. "We wanted to reconcile the mixed findings regarding who tends to garner more support for social justice issues."

Shapiro, the Dean's Chair in Organizational Behavior and the Clarice Smith Professor of Management for the Smith School, collaborated with Jigyashu Shukla, assistant professor at the Willie A. Deese College of Business and Economics at North Carolina A&T State University and Deshani Ganegoda, associate professor at the Melbourne Business School at the University of Melbourne. They investigated when and why a social justice appeal gains support depending on "who" is issuing the appeal.

The advocate is either someone who belongs to the marginalized group seeking social justice—a disadvantaged group advocate (DGA)—or an ally. That's someone who doesn't belong to the marginalized group.

There have been several studies on allyship, but Shapiro says, "No one until our paper has looked at how strongly the people receiving the social justice appeal identify with the disadvantaged group named in it." Their paper finds when the appeal receiver identifies with the group, the DGA is more persuasive. When the receiver does not identify with the group, the ally is.

The findings are [published](#) in the journal *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*.

What also separates this study from others is that it measures perceptions of the [social justice](#) appeal's credibility and the empathy of the person targeted for the appeal. "Because we know once both of those are strong, that's when you're going to get support for the appeal," says Shapiro.

Both the empathy and credibility of the [appeal](#) are higher when the person receiving it feels they are similar to the advocate. This similarity can relate to demographics like gender or race or relate to another commonality such as a shared experience. For example, a remote worker who feels excluded from in-person meetings could better convince another remote worker who feels the same to support more hybrid meetings.

Shapiro says the power of similarity suggests that, "Similarity triggers trust and once you trust the messenger, whatever the messenger says has more credibility and evokes more empathy." It's a characteristic of tribalism that can bolster support.

Research like this—on allyship—is increasing but remains scarce. Shapiro says these studies are burgeoning because "organizations are becoming more aware of their [corporate social responsibility](#) which includes treating all of their employees fairly."

More information: Deshani B. Ganegoda et al, Garnering support for social justice: When and why is "yes" likelier for "allies" versus "disadvantaged group advocates"?, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.obhdp.2024.104332](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2024.104332)

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