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Journal of Counseling Psychology


ISSN: 0022-0167

2023, Vol. 70, No. 6, 631–644
https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000709

# Defining Racial Allies: A Qualitative Investigation of White Allyship From the Perspective of People of Color

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While interdisciplinary scholars and activists urge White allies to engage in racial justice work led by the voices of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), to date, most research on racial allyship has centered exclusively on the perspective of White allies themselves. Thus, the purpose of this study was to create a framework of racial allyship from the perspective of BIPOC. Utilizing constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014), focus groups were conducted to understand how BIPOC describe the knowledge, skills, and actions of White allies. Participants across eight focus groups described allyship as an ongoing interpersonal process that included a lifelong commitment to (a) building trust, (b) engaging in antiracist action, (c) critical awareness, (d) sociopolitical knowledge, (e) accountability, and (f) communicating and disseminating information. The findings of this study point to several avenues through which White counseling psychologists can incorporate racial allyship in their research, training, clinical, and advocacy work that align with our field's emphasis on social justice, multiculturalism, and prevention.

***Public Significance Statement***

This study describes the defining characteristics of racial allies from the perspective of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). Racial allyship was described as a lifelong interpersonal and action-oriented process. Results from this study can be integrated into the many roles of counseling psychologists, including research, training, clinical work, and advocacy.

*Keywords:* racial allyship, White allies, social justice, constructivist grounded theory

*Supplemental materials:* https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000709.supp

Counseling psychologists have been leaders in researching the lived experiences of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC)[1] for decades (e.g., Arredondo et al., 1996; Helms, 1990), and have been particularly prolific in explicating the deleterious impact of systemic racism and white[2] supremacy (e.g., Pieterse et al., 2012). Scholars have defined *white supremacy* as the political, economic, and cultural system that sustains White people's power and dominance across institutional and social systems (Ansley, 1997). White supremacy is the mechanism that sanctions the

[1] The research team decided to use the term BIPOC because of its inclusive nature and centering of Black person's experiences in the United States as our sample was 65% Black. However, to not obfuscate literature on BIPOC experiences, it is important to note that our sample did not include Indigenous participants.

[2] After consultation with racial justice scholars, we have decided to capitalize the word White when the word is being used to denote a shared cultural identity (e.g., White people, White allies, White individuals). However, we intentionally lowercase white when using words that reinforce white dominance (e.g., white supremacy and white privilege) to strip power from these words.

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The authors have no known conflicts of interest to disclose. This study was not preregistered.

Cassandra L. Hinger played a lead role in conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology, project administration, visualization, writing–original draft, and writing–review and editing. Cirleen DeBlaere played a supporting role in conceptualization, supervision, and writing–review and editing. Rebecca Gwira played a supporting role in data curation, formal analysis, investigation, and writing–review and editing. Michelle Aiello played a supporting role in data curation, formal analysis, and writing–review and editing. Arash Punjwani played a supporting role in data curation and formal analysis. Laura Cobourne played a supporting role in data curation and formal analysis. Ngoc Tran played a supporting role in formal analysis. Madison Lord played a supporting role in formal analysis. Jordan Mike played a supporting role in formal analysis. Carlton Green played a supporting role in writing–review and editing and consultation.

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entrenchment of racism in our society, causing systemic disparities, unjust burden, and harm to BIPOC (Grzanka et al., 2019; Miller et al., 2018). Critical works by BIPOC scholars have articulated how BIPOC can resist and heal from racism and racial trauma (e.g., Mosley et al., 2021). However, addressing racism requires that White people examine their complicity in white supremacy and work alongside BIPOC to develop concrete actions (e.g., Singh, 2020). Understanding and promoting authentic racial allyship may be one way that White people can begin to engage in this required work.

Broadly, an ally has been defined as "a member of a dominant group who works to end the system of oppression that gives them greater privilege and power based upon their social group membership" (Broido, 2000, p. 3). It follows then that racial allyship involves White people working to end racism and white supremacy. A review of interdisciplinary literature supports Spanierman and Smith's (2017) prior outline of defining characteristics of White allies[3], such that White allies (a) demonstrate a knowledge and awareness of power, privilege, and oppression, particularly the historical legacy of racism and white privilege (Reason et al., 2005; Smith & Redington, 2010); (b) engage in continuous self-reflection regarding their own white racial identity, positionality, and ways in which they may be perpetuating racism (Case, 2012; Helms, 2017; Reason et al., 2005; Spanierman & Smith, 2017; Williams & Sharif, 2021); (c) leverage their racial privilege to engage in transformative antiracist actions at individual and systemic levels (K. Brown & Ostrove, 2013; Case, 2012; Kendi, 2019; Kivel, 2017; Spanierman & Smith, 2017); (d) work in solidarity with BIPOC individuals and communities (Boutte & Jackson, 2014; Spanierman & Smith, 2017); and (e) intentionally engage other White individuals in antiracist work and challenging white privilege (Goodman, 2011; Reason et al., 2005; Williams & Sharif, 2021).

It is important to highlight that much of the research on racial allyship is from the perspective and positionality of White allies themselves (e.g., Case, 2012; Reason et al., 2005). While this work has been helpful in conceptualizing and operationalizing white allyship, critical race scholars (e.g., Matsuda et al., 1993), multicultural scholars (e.g., Boutte & Jackson, 2014), and current grassroots racial justice activists (e.g., Mann & Baker, 2020) have urged White allies to engage in racial justice work that is led by BIPOC. Thus, it is critical to center BIPOC voices in our understanding of racial allyship (K. Brown & Ostrove, 2013). Moreover, given the nature of allyship, it seems fundamental to the concept that allyship be defined and decided by BIPOC. In other words, and as articulated by others (e.g., Sue, 2017), allyship, racial or otherwise, is a role and action orientation that can and should be aspirational for the person or group with the more privileged positionality but may not be an identity that one can claim.

Indeed, when BIPOC perspectives have been centered, BIPOC describes the challenges they face when engaging with allies. For example, in one study of BIPOC diversity educators, participants shared that working with whiteness can be taxing for BIPOC, particularly when White allies engage racial justice language without the willingness to make the sacrifices necessary to enact transformative change (Mathew et al., 2023). Similarly, BIPOC women described encountering racial microaggressions in the form of tone policing, expectations to educate others, and defensive reactions to feedback in feminist-ally spaces (Nuru & Arendt, 2019). These narratives highlight the ways that some White allies can continue to reinforce white supremacy in their interactions with BIPOC in insidious ways and fail to address white supremacy within themselves and their own communities.

Although the few studies discussed above examined BIPOC's challenges with White allies, to our knowledge, only one empirical study has utilized qualitative methodologies to examine how BIPOC characterize and define racial allies (K. Brown & Ostrove, 2013). The themes that emerged from their study focused largely on interpersonal characteristics (e.g., allies create a feeling of connection and share similar interests), as well as some more action-oriented qualities (e.g., propose actions to address racism; K. Brown & Ostrove, 2013). While this study makes an important contribution to our understanding of racial allyship, the authors identified some limitations. First, their interview questions were modeled after a study examining what lesbian, gay, and bisexual participants desired from their heterosexual allies in the workplace (Brooks & Edwards, 2009). Given this narrower focus, the themes they derived may not fully encompass the dynamics of racial allyship. In addition, their participants described both White allies and BIPOC allies from racial or ethnic groups outside of their own. Although both forms of solidarity are important, combining these two groups obfuscates the unique positionality of White allies in dismantling the oppressive system that they created and from which they benefit (Munin & Speight, 2010). Accordingly, we hope to build upon this work in the present study.

## The Present Study

Overall, there are a limited number of studies on white allyship in the psychological literature (Grzanka et al., 2019) and even fewer studies that center the experiences of BIPOC in racial allyship. Thus, the present study hopes to heed the call of many BIPOC leaders in counseling psychology (e.g., Hargons et al., 2017; Singh, 2020) by centering BIPOC perspectives to inform how white allyship can support racial justice efforts, while also acknowledging the work that White individuals must take upon themselves to engage in allyship. Utilizing a constructivist grounded theory (CGT) methodology with BIPOC focus groups, the guiding research question was: How do BIPOC define racial allyship in their own lives?

# Method

## Research Design

As our foundational framework, CGT posits that both the data and analyses are social constructions that reflect the conditions of researchers' and participants' temporality and culture (Charmaz, 2014). Epistemologically grounded in subjectivism, CGT denies that researchers can be neutral observers or value-free experts (Charmaz, 2014). As is typical with CGT, symbolic interactionism was our guiding theoretical lens. Symbolic interactionism posits that people construct meaning through a reciprocal process of actions and interpretations, assuming that social processes are dynamic instead of static and unchanging (Charmaz, 2014).

Our study was also informed by critical race theory, which "challenges the universality of white experiences/judgments as

[3] Given the definition of an ally, the terms racial ally and White ally are considered synonymous and used interchangeably throughout the article.

the authoritative standard that binds people of color" (Tate, 1997, pp. 196–197). Although initially developed by legal scholars, critical race theory has been utilized to deconstruct oppressive structures and discourse across several other disciplines, including psychology (e.g., Fine & Cross, 2016). Thus, we utilized a critical lens, in conjunction with CGT, to examine where white supremacy may manifest in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data to orient our work toward liberation (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994).

## Sampling

After receiving institutional board approval, participants were recruited from the undergraduate research pool at a Southeastern University. College students were selected as the inclusion group because college can be a crucial time in ally development due to the increase in identity exploration and greater exposure to a diversity of people, allowing for more opportunities for interracial relationship building (Broido, 2000; K. Brown & Ostrove, 2013). To participate in the study, individuals needed to be over the age of 18 and self-identify as a BIPOC. Participants' social identities are presented in Table 1. Sample size was determined by theoretical saturation (Charmaz, 2014), in which we obtained full theoretical saturation at eight focus group sessions (29 participants).

## Focus Group Facilitators

Rebecca Gwira, Michelle Aiello, Arash Punjwani, and Laura Cobourne led focus group discussions (see Table 2, for author identities and positionality). Focus groups consisted of two facilitators. Group facilitators were selected based on their interest and experience in racial justice scholarship, advanced interviewing skills, and previous experience with group facilitation (Kress & Shoffner, 2007). Prior to the start of focus groups, facilitators were given an overview of allyship literature and a detailed description of the study goals. The first author provided training on the presentation of focus group questions and appropriate probes. Facilitators were encouraged to use broad probes to elicit further discussion and more specific probes for clarification that were "open-ended yet directed" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 84). Group facilitators were paired together based on diversity of racial backgrounds and level of group facilitation experience. After each group session, facilitators debriefed with the first author and were provided feedback. Two group facilitators were also members of the coding team.

## Data Collection

Consistent with general recommendations for CGT methodology, the authors deemed focus groups an appropriate method of data collection because they were interested in the depth and richness of the interactive meaning-making process as participants discussed racial allyship together (Charmaz, 2014; Kress & Shoffner, 2007). This approach allowed researchers to capture individual perspectives as they emerged within a unique social context (Massey, 2011). The first author created the focus group discussion questions after a thorough review of allyship literature. Two experts in multicultural

**Table 1**
*Participant Demographics by Focus Group*

| FG | Name | Age | Gender | Race | Nationality | Sexual orientation | Social class |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Evelyn | 34 | Woman | Black | American | Heterosexual | Middle |
| | Korra | 23 | Woman | Asian | American | Lesbian/Gay | Middle |
| 2 | Riley | 21 | Woman | Black | American | Bisexual | Upper middle |
| | Ryan | 20 | Woman | Black | American | Heterosexual | Working |
| | Asha | 25 | Woman | Black | Somali | Heterosexual | Working |
| | Laila | 21 | Woman | Black | American | Bisexual | Working |
| | JMath | 21 | Man | Black | Ghanaian | None reported | Middle |
| 3 | Ali | 22 | Man | Asian | American | Heterosexual | Upper middle |
| | Maryam | 20 | Woman | Black and Hispanic/Latine | American | Heterosexual | Working |
| | Alison | 21 | Woman | Black | American | Heterosexual | Upper middle |
| 4 | Buttercup | 26 | Woman | Black | Nigerian | Heterosexual | Middle |
| | Neha | 23 | Woman | Asian | Bengali | Heterosexual | Middle |
| | London | 22 | Woman | Black | American | Heterosexual | Middle |
| 5 | Diamond | 23 | Woman | Black and Hispanic/Latine | American | Heterosexual | Working |
| | PH | 41 | Man | Hispanic/Latine | Uruguayan/American | Heterosexual | Working |
| | Muny | 41 | Woman | Black | American | Heterosexual | Working |
| | Tasha A. | 21 | Woman | Black | American | Heterosexual | Middle |
| 6 | Jamaal | 21 | Man | Black | American | Heterosexual | Working |
| | Brian | 21 | Man | Asian | Taiwanese | Heterosexual | Middle |
| | John Doe | 22 | Man | Black | Nigerian/American | Heterosexual | Middle |
| | Angel | 20 | Woman | Asian | Korean American | Bisexual | Middle |
| | Calvin | 21 | Man | Black | American | Heterosexual | Lower |
| 7 | Asia | 23 | Woman | Black | American | Heterosexual | Lower |
| | Giselle | 22 | Woman | Black | American | Heterosexual | Upper middle |
| | Tasha B. | 20 | Woman | Black | American | Heterosexual | Upper middle |
| 8 | John | 18 | Man | Middle Eastern | Iranian American | Bisexual | Working class |
| | Lena | 21 | Woman | Asian | American | Heterosexual | Middle |
| | Fred | 21 | Man | Black | Nigerian | Heterosexual | Upper middle |
| | Alia | 20 | Woman | Asian | American | Heterosexual | Working |

*Note*. FG = focus group. All demographic information is self-reported.

**Table 2**
*Positionality of Authors*

| Team member | Salient identities | Key biases, assumptions, and areas of less awareness | Strategies used to account for key biases, assumptions, and diminished awareness |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cassandra Hinger<br>Coder | White, queer, cisgender woman, educationally privileged, low socioeconomic background, CP doctoral candidate | White privilege and indoctrination in academia created diminished awareness around participant narratives and how allyship is discussed and critiqued outside of academic spaces; desire to work as a racial ally resulted in personalized reactions to the data and coding process | Memoed to help identify assumptions, process personal reactions, and ensure consistency in coding practices; recruited racially diverse research team; encouraged challenging of White privilege and practices reflective of White supremacy culture (i.e., challenged self to take less of a "leader" oriented role in the coding process). |
| Cirleen DeBlaere | Multiracial, cisgender woman, heterosexual, 1.5 generation immigrant, first-generation college student, currently higher socioeconomic status, able-bodied | Assumed the work of racial allyship often falls on BIPOC even as the supposed beneficiaries of that work; areas of positionality related privilege and less privilege impact my allyship experiences and conceptualization | Consultation with and feedback from critical race scholars and practitioners. Engaging literatures, narratives, and multimedia related to race, ethnicity, and White supremacy. |
| Rebecca Gwira<br>Coder GF | Black, Ghanaian American, able-bodied, straight, cisgender woman, middle-class family, CP doctoral student | Skeptical about performative White allyship; assumed shared skepticism of Whiteness with other BIPOC in study; low insight to racial trauma in participants' sharing. | Always referred discussion back to the transcript for participant's exact wording to avoid having biases around my experiences with performative allyship guide interpretation; openly discussed skepticism of performative allyship with team |
| Michelle Aiello<br>GF | White Latine of Cuban and Argentine descent, cisgender woman, straight, first-generation student, low-income family, CP Doctoral student | Views of allyship informed by intersection of my racial and ethnic identity; personal and academic conceptualization of allyship seemed to increase likelihood that I started to ask leading follow-up questions. | Sought feedback from team to ensure the follow-up questions and reflections were aligned with the words and meaning shared directly by participants; processed my reactions to participants statements with team. |
| Arash Punjwani<br>Coder GF | Asian, Pakistani, immigrant, straight, cisgender, man, college educated | South Asian lens on allyship led to less awareness of other BIPOC experiences with allies; assumptions of racism by White people; assumption of allyship as an enactment of White savior complex. | Note-taking during the coding process to better understand some of the nuances of allyship described by participants; check understanding of data and coding through discussion with diverse team members; spent time with data to recognize variance in how BIPOC view White privilege and allyship |
| Laura Cobourne<br>GF | Black, Jamaican American, Chinese ancestry, able-bodied, queer, genderqueer woman, CP doctoral candidate | Caribbean upbringing influences perspective on U.S. racism; view of allyship shaped by academic spaces; negative experiences with self-identified White allies; connection to straight allies influences expectations of White allies. | Reflected, evaluated, and processed assumptions with team; solicited feedback (personal and on focus group facilitation) |
| Ngoc Tran<br>Coder | Cisgender, queer, Vietnamese American, immigrant, clinical mental health master's student | Unpacking internalized racism against Asian Americans and other BIPOC folks, including the need for proximity to Whiteness; less awareness around my privilege (e.g., being able-bodied and moving SES over the years) | Discussed salient identities and areas of privilege during researcher process; discoursed with other researchers to understand different lenses; deconstructed and challenged previous meaning making of allyship by centering the participants' experiences and keeping notes on interpretations of the data. |
| Madison Lord<br>Coder | White, straight, cisgender woman, able-bodied, from middle-class family, clinical mental health master's student | Undergoing process of unpacking my unearned privileges (i.e., White privilege); fears of being perceived as performative resulted in gaps in awareness and personal reactions in coding | Note-taking throughout the coding process to facilitate more open conversations during group dialogue; welcomed feedback in discussions; sought out ongoing conversations outside of academic spaces to continue challenging observed/unobserved biases |

(*table continues*)

**Table 2** (*continued*)

| Team member | Salient identities | Key biases, assumptions, and areas of less awareness | Strategies used to account for key biases, assumptions, and diminished awareness |
|---|---|---|---|
| Jordan Mike<br>Coder | Black, Bahamian, African, American, cisgender, straight, man, clinical mental health master's student | Caribbean identity and upbringing at times limits knowledge of historical context of racism in the United States; biases against the intentionality of White providers; unfamiliar with allyship literature | Kept journal of coding process and reactions during coding; regularly sought feedback in group to ensure all participants' data were being analyzed consistently and the themes accurately represented the voices of the participants; engaged in allyship literature. |
| Carlton Green | Black cisgender gay male midcareer counseling psychologist. Independent practitioner and antiracism consultant | Psychology training often fails to adequately address racial factors; gender privilege can hamper cismen's perception of how racism differentially impacts racially minoritized people with multiple marginalized identities. | Maintain a network of trusted colleagues and collaborators to discuss questions and curiosities pertaining to racial issues; consume literature and media that amplify the experiences of the racially marginalized and teach about Black male privilege. |

*Note.* Table format from Mosley et al. (2021). Cirleen DeBlaere and Carlton Green were noncoding authors and provided consultation. GF = group facilitator; CP = counseling psychology; BIPOC = Black, Indigenous, and people of color; SES = socioeconomic status.

research (Expert 1: multiracial, heterosexual, cisgender woman; Expert 2: White, European American, gay cisgender man) reviewed the focus group questions and made minor suggestions. Focus group questions were delivered in a semistructured format consisting of eight questions with follow-up questions and probes (Kress & Shoffner, 2007). Facilitators first asked participants to define racial allyship and then provided the Broido's (2000) broad definition of allies for group discussion. This was followed by questions that explored participants' perceptions of knowledge, skills, and actions that allies possessed soliciting for specific examples. We then inquired how participants made the distinction between an ally and a friend to help clarify the defining characteristics of racial allies.[4]

After gathering consent, data were collected by conducting in-person 50–70-min focus groups in the Fall of 2019 and Winter of 2020. Participants created pseudonyms in the focus groups that were subsequently used throughout the article. Each group session was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by an encrypted online service and verified for accuracy. Reflecting best practices in qualitative research (Yeh & Inman, 2007), participants were given the opportunity to provide feedback on their experience in the group and any additional insights on racial allyship in a brief online follow-up questionnaire. Fourteen participants responded to the survey, with at least one member of each focus group represented. After the first focus group session, one participant suggested a minor rephrasing of one question to better comprehend what was being asked. This change was implemented in subsequent focus groups. No other changes were suggested.

## Analysis

### *Data Analytical Strategies*

We utilized iterative and recursive strategies of data analyses and comparative methods to facilitate consistent researcher engagement with the data and analyses (Charmaz, 2014). Researchers compared codes and categories across all focus group sessions and participant data (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Consistent with CGT, the coding team participated in three levels of inductive coding: open coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2014).

Open coding consisted of researchers individually hand-coding transcripts line-by-line into meaning units (i.e., concepts extracted from participant responses; Charmaz, 2014). After each focus group script was individually coded, the research team met to discuss the application of the codes to the data. These meetings allowed for coders to bring their insights on applying and integrating codes, generating new codes and categories, and processing personal reactions throughout the coding process. Consensus among the researchers was needed to apply codes to units of data. When there was disagreement on the applicability of a code, consensus was reached through discussion and code adjustment. Discussions on coding discrepancies also allowed researchers to begin identifying how certain categories were related to one another. We constructed 183 open codes across eight focus group sessions. All initial codes were provisional, comparative, and grounded in the data (Charmaz, 2014).

[4] The codes and categories that defined the difference between friends and allies were deemed beyond the scope of this article and will be included in an alternative article.

Following open coding, the research team engaged in focused coding in which codes were further refined into broader, conceptual categories and subcategories (Charmaz, 2014). For example, codes related to antiracist actions (e.g., confronting friends when they say something racist) were compared to one another and integrated into broad concepts (e.g., standing up regardless of consequences). At this stage, codes with greater theoretical centrality were elevated in the analysis process (Charmaz, 2014). For instance, independent broad concepts became preliminary categories (e.g., building trust), while concepts that demonstrated how to engage in that category were separated into subcategories (e.g., practicing empathy). During the focused coding stage, the core category also began to emerge (Charmaz, 2014).

In the next stage of theoretical coding, coders ensured theoretical salience of the categories, conceptualized how categories related to one another, and integrated these into a comprehensive framework of racial allyship (Charmaz, 2014). The core category (i.e., committing fully to allyship) that connected all the constructed categories to form a conceptual model became more defined during this phase. Researchers consistently referred to the primary research question to guide the coding process and integration of codes and categories. Codes that our analysis did not confirm as central to the theoretical model were removed. For example, codes and categories that differentiated between friends and allies (e.g., greater expectation for allies to act) were dropped from analyses. Instead, the research team focused specifically on the actions that participants attributed unique to racial allies and integrated those codes into the described categories. All focus group scripts were again reviewed and coded with the final coding structure to confirm that the developed categories captured the identified meaning units.

### *Methodological Integrity*

We utilized several strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of our data collection and analysis process. First, we collected rich descriptions from participants by soliciting detailed examples from participants that provided insight into their experiences with allyship and the specific contexts in which those experiences occurred (Morrow, 2007). We also used member checks by providing copies of transcribed focus group sessions and the final coding structure to the participants soliciting corrective feedback (Morrow, 2007). No participants responded with corrections or additional insights. Finally, we triangulated the coding process with all research team members to further establish credibility as a consensus about code application was needed.

Consistent with CGT best practices (Charmaz, 2014), research team members participated in reflexivity and analytic memoranda throughout the research process. All research team members documented and discussed their social positioning, assumptions, biases, and personal reactions throughout all stages of the study (Morrow, 2007). The positionalities, biases, assumptions, and areas of less awareness that were the most salient for researchers are noted in Table 2 along with strategies used to account for these biases in the research process.

## Results

Participants defined racial allyship through a conceptual model that described six domains of ally characteristics. The category that was at the core of our data was participants' desire for allies to commit fully to racial allyship. Committing fully to allyship involved White allies investing time and effort into allyship practices and learning. Analogous to Helms' White racial identity theory (Helms, 1990), committing fully to allyship also included an emotional investment that called for allies to move beyond the intellectualization of allyship toward a deep, personal, and lifelong commitment to liberation. In every focus group, participants asserted that allies cannot pick and choose when to be an ally but must focus on racial justice in all actions possible. London, a 22-year-old Black woman, summarized succinctly how she expected allies to support all aspects of racial justice: "If you're going to be an ally, you have to be 100% in, not halfway into causes."

Participants also discussed that racial allies make their allyship visible by engaging in antiracist behaviors across all platforms and spheres of influence in their life. While responding to what actions allies can take, Tasha A, a 21-year-old Black woman, described several different potential platforms and roles for racial allies:

> Advocating on social media, creating petitions, speeches at certain conferences, just being out there, being in the parks, or going to the national level. It's just being out there, putting yourself out there. At any and every event you can, to get people on your side. And the people that you do have on your side, keeping them, keeping their attention, giving them direction. Just having a plan.

Committing fully to allyship consisted of six categories: (a) building trust, (b) engaging in action, (c) critical awareness, (d) sociopolitical knowledge, (e) accountability, and (f) communicating and disseminating information. Each category subsumed subcategories in which participants identified specific ways that allies can demonstrate a commitment to their respective categories with examples of representative participant quotes (see Table S1, for additional sample quotes). The categories, and their constituent subcategories, are presented in order of participant endorsement.

### Building Trust

BIPOC in our sample indicated that racial allies take the time to build and rebuild trust with individuals who are racially and culturally different from themselves. Building trust included five subcategories of interpersonal strategies critical to establishing trust and safety with BIPOC: (a) practice empathy ($n = 40$),[5] (b) practice humility ($n = 32$), (c) recognize common humanity ($n = 21$), (d) recognize differences ($n = 17$), and (e) respect boundaries ($n = 13$).

#### *Practice Empathy*

Participants indicated that allies try to understand BIPOC perspectives and nuanced experiences. For example, allies can sit with difficult emotions that BIPOC may experience due to experiences of marginalization without minimizing or immediately moving to problem solving. When describing the most significant attribute of a racial ally, John Doe, a 22-year-old Black man, stated: "A strong sense of empathy, because you got to be able to understand whatever troubles any minority group may be facing … Be compassionate toward it." John Doe's response captured other

[5] *n*'s represent the number of times each code was applied throughout focus groups.

participant's desire for genuine compassion and understanding to be the driving force of allyship. Some, like Angel, a 20-year-old Asian American woman, described further that without empathy and relational support, racial allyship is impossible. "It's just really about understanding and being able to relate. If you just don't have that, then becoming an ally or being thought of as an ally is just out of the question."

### *Practice Humility*

Similarly, participants reported that a defining component of racial allyship is practicing humility. Participants explained that racial allies remain open-minded and refrain from judging people or situations. JMath, a 21-year-old Black man, reported, "Don't try to have power over us or, like, belittle us. You got to be humble as if you are with us, and don't try to put yourself above us." JMath's response demonstrates that often White individuals can engage in racial justice work in ways that perpetuate paternalism and replicate racial hierarchies. Others agreed that, when racial allies engage in racial justice work, they do not think of themselves as "heroes" or "saviors." Instead, a characteristic that can distinguish racial allies is that they do not think or act in ways that convey superiority over BIPOC. Others agreed that, when racial allies engage in racial justice work, they do not think of themselves as "heroes" or "saviors."

### *Recognize Common Humanity*

Participants wanted allies to understand that, as people, we all have shared experiences. Korra, a 23-year-old Asian American woman, stated, "We're all in this boat together. We're all just doing our own thing, trying to do the best we can in life." Many participants conveyed a similar message as Korra, urging White allies to see BIPOC through a sense of "shared humanity." Participants explicitly named a moral or human obligation to combat interpersonal and systemic racism, calling to be treated with respect for their human dignity. For example, Asia, a 23-year-old Black woman, advised allies to simply "behave as though we are all humans."

### *Recognize Differences*

Just as participants expected allies to recognize the common humanity shared between people, they also wanted racial allies to recognize and celebrate the differences that exist in cultural experiences. Participants shared personal stories about allies in their lives who acknowledged the cultural differences between them. They highlighted the harm of viewing differences as divisive or denying differences exist at all. Evelyn, a 34-year-old Black woman, defined a racial ally as "someone who recognizes ethnicity, the color of my race … doesn't necessarily say "I don"t see color' because I feel like that is the reason why things are the way they are. Because we do need to recognize it."

Beyond differences between allies and BIPOC, participants also described that allies recognize that BIPOC are not a monolithic group. Although the word intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) did not explicitly come up in discussions, several participants shared that strong allies are aware that an individual's multitude of identities can intersect with their racial identity in unique ways. Buttercup, a 26-year-old Black woman, had this advice to allies:

> I would say you have to talk about gender, too … For example, Caucasian [*sic*] men see African American men as a threat … there's a huge percent[age] of African American men that are in jail for literally pointless reasons … with women and men, it's all different.

Buttercup was acutely aware of how gendered racism was occurring in her community and affected Black men and Black women in different ways. She made it clear that racial allies need to ground their understanding of racism in an intersectionality framework. Participants further reported that, given the vast amount of diversity within the BIPOC population, allies do not generalize one BIPOC individual's perspective to all individuals within that group.

### *Respect Boundaries*

Participants noted the importance of setting appropriate boundaries when working with racial allies. Accordingly, participants described that racial allies respect the personal and cultural boundaries of BIPOC. Maryam, a 20-year-old Black Latina woman, described:

> I feel like experience and knowledge are separate things. You can be knowledgeable about it [racism], knowing what the problem is, why it happens, but you'll never experience it … like giving birth. You can learn about it, but you won't truly know the pain a woman [sic] goes through unless you yourself give birth.

Maryam's powerful use of birth as a metaphor illustrates the clear boundary between allies' knowledge and the lived experiences of BIPOC. Several other participants stated that allies respect cultural boundaries around humor, knowledge, and interpersonal behaviors and do not engage in behaviors or actions that are not appropriate for White individuals.

## Engage in Antiracist Action

Participants called for racial allies to orient their knowledge of racial injustice to specific actions and activities that promote racial equity. They provided examples of allies who take the initiative by engaging in antiracist behaviors or actions across multiple settings and levels. They described that allies take action in the following ways: (a) stand up regardless of consequences ($n = 49$), (b) use privilege as a tool ($n = 26$), (c) share resources ($n = 11$), and (d) work within the system ($n = 8$).

### *Stand Up Regardless of Consequences*

Participants reported that racial allies are willing to stand up against racism and racial discrimination irrespective of the possible negative consequences they may face as a result. For example, many participants described that racial allies must address racism with their friends and families despite possible ruptures in these relationships. Other participants identified that allies must be willing to sacrifice their comfort, finances, and physical safety when necessary. Standing up for racial justice also included attending protests, marches, and demonstrations. As Laila, a 21-year-old Black woman, explained:

> Like with Martin Luther King, they were doing those sit-ins, and they had the White people doing it with them, they were willing to get beat on and spat on and cursed out, and during the marches, they were willing to get hosed down. You have to be willing to handle whatever that race is handling as well.

As indicated by Laila's quote, participants discussed that racial allies are willing to make their support visible and endure similar hardships and injustices that many BIPOC encounter while fighting for racial equity.

### *Use Privilege as a Tool*

The participants in our study described how allies can use their racial privilege in service to BIPOC. More specifically, White allies use the safety and power that come with their racial privilege to amplify BIPOC voices and narratives, expose the harms to BIPOC due to racism, and intervene in potentially dangerous situations for BIPOC. Riley, a 21-year-old Black woman, described how a White ally in her life helped de-escalate a situation in which the police pulled over her and her friends:

> There was a White guy in the passenger seat, and the Black guy got pulled over, and the officer was coming up to the driver side, and my White friend just immediately started talking to [the officer], and it really just de-escalated the whole scene.

Other examples of racial allies using privilege as a tool included physically protecting BIPOC protestors and using their phones to record instances of racism or police brutality.

### *Share Resources*

Participants indicated several ways that racial allies share access to material and nonmaterial resources with BIPOC as a way of correcting the historical and contemporary limits to access experienced by BIPOC. Some participants discussed that allies donate to antiracist causes and organizations or directly to BIPOC individuals and communities. Alison, a 21-year-old Black woman, suggested, "If someone is down in hard times because of unjust circumstances, give what you can. Whether that's money or a job opportunity." Similarly, participants noted that allies also share access to less tangible resources such as insight, networks, influence, and spaces with BIPOC. Evelyn discussed the stress that she experienced due to "code-switching" in predominantly White spaces. "If minorities didn't have to code-switch … you know, just to make [White people] feel comfortable, that would be great for allies to explore." Like Evelyn, other participants noted that allies share access to comfort, power, and control with BIPOC by intentionally creating spaces inclusive of BIPOC voices, perspectives, people, and culture.

### *Work Within the System*

Participants described that allies find and create opportunities to address racism beyond individual actions and join efforts at systemic levels to create lasting racial equity. For many participants, working within the system meant voting. John, an 18-year-old Middle Eastern man, stated: "If people start voting at higher rates from local levels up, then, we can get those racist people and laws out of the way, and then a lot more people can have their voices heard." John, as well as other participants, called on racial allies to show up to vote and to vote in alignment with racial justice values. Other examples included voting for BIPOC candidates and other candidates that promote racial justice, engaging in political careers, and supporting antidiscrimination legislation.

## Critical Awareness

BIPOC in this study reported that racial allies utilize a critical lens to interrogate their understanding of their identities and experiences. Participants discussed that racial allies have a robust understanding of themselves as cultural and racial beings. Moreover, racial allies demonstrate that awareness in their interactions with others. We identified four subcategories within critical awareness, with two subcategories representing forms of foundational personal awareness (a) awareness of self ($n = 24$) and (b) awareness of privilege ($n = 16$), and two subcategories representing critical awareness practices: (c) critically consume information ($n = 13$), and (d) challenge racist socialization ($n = 12$).

### *Awareness of Self*

Participants collectively described how racial allies are aware of their own cultural identities and worldview, as well as their intentions and motivations for engaging in racial justice work. For example, Alison shared:

> I feel like oftentimes people do things to get attention … But if your intention is wrong, then you can't really be a good ally because you don't genuinely care about the person or the cause … Some people do it to prove to themselves that they aren't as bad of a person, or they aren't racist.

Like Allison, other participants stated that racial allies are genuine about their intentions with others, particularly with BIPOC. Participants urged racial allies to remain authentic in their interactions with BIPOC. For many participants, authenticity, as an extension of self-awareness, was an essential component of allyship that appeared in every focus group discussion.

### *Awareness of Privilege*

In addition to awareness of self, participants identified that allies must be aware of how privilege operates in U.S. society. Allies recognize the unearned privilege that White individuals hold and how white supremacy structures society to benefit White people, norms, and culture. Participants shared examples of how white privilege, or rather their lack of access to its benefits, impacted their jobs, education, and the ability to receive adequate health care.

Participants explained that racial allies are mindful of differences in power and privilege within their environments, relationships, and institutions. Alison reiterated this point by stating, "I think to be a successful ally, you have to be conscious of your privilege in just day-to-day things that you do that you may not realize affect people of color or have an impact." Other participants shared that allies are willing to learn and confront the complexities, consequences, and personal benefits of their white privilege.

### *Critically Consume Information*

Participants also proposed that allies are motivated to unlearn false and racially biased narratives. BIPOC in our sample indicated that racial allies search out counternarratives through books, research, art, and storytelling centering BIPOC experiences and perspectives. Many focus group discussions centered on the biased nature of mainstream media and the current historical perspectives perpetuated in education. Diamond, a 23-year-old Black Latina woman, explained:

> I would expect an ally to know history, and hopefully accurate history, because sometimes what they teach us is a lie. A big, bold-faced lie. And be able to do research … Not always believe everything that people say. Just have good judgment.

Diamond's quote highlights a desire for racial allies to put effort into developing discernment regarding culturally biased information. Some participants reported that racial allies should engage in regular fact-checking and source-checking to better scrutinize the media for biased reports. Other participants identified that allies apply a critical lens to what they learn and question who benefits and who is harmed from the narratives they are told.

### *Challenge Racist Socialization*

Participants shared examples of how White individuals can interact with members of their own and other racial groups that can often perpetuate racism. Indeed, participants shared painful experiences of when White individuals were unaware of how their racist thinking and actions impacted BIPOC. In contrast, participants discussed that racial allies actively work to challenge the misrepresentations, stereotypes, and biases that they hold. Diamond reported:

> White people only have to know or care about what they want to … I'm actually nine months pregnant, and I was just walking around the grocery store with a basket … And this [White] lady looked me dead in my eyes, and asked me do I work here? Did you just ask me that because I'm the only Black person you see right here? For allies, you have to break out of that box.

Diamond's response was like other participants' responses who expected White allies to think critically about their socialization as White people and not engage BIPOC in ways that perpetuate racial hierarchies, stereotypes, or prejudices. Others discussed that allies understand that there are a plurality of experiences beyond what Tasha A. described as "White people knowledge." Namely, that the cultural narratives of whiteness are not universal to all people.

## Sociopolitical Knowledge

Sociopolitical knowledge consisted of the current and historical knowledge that BIPOC deemed to be crucial to allyship, particularly as it relates to culture, racial inequities, and social movements. Two distinct subcategories emerged within sociopolitical knowledge: (a) cultural knowledge ($n = 35$) and (b) knowledge of oppression ($n = 17$).

### *Cultural Knowledge*

BIPOC in our sample reported that racial allies take the time to learn about different cultures and communities outside of their own. Participants emphasized that knowledge of the history, language, interpersonal norms, and values of a community are critical to joining in allyship. JMath explained:

> Without knowing the type of culture or religion, you're just going to go into whatever country or whatever group you're trying to support without any knowledge of who they are, what they are about, or even the situation that you're trying to fight for.

Because of the dynamic nature of culture, many participants shared that they wanted racial allies to be engaging with the cultures of those they are allied within a consistent and authentic way so that they may be better able to relate to both the struggles and the strengths of BIPOC communities. Some participants highlighted that acquiring such knowledge was a sign of respect and commitment to allyship.

### *Knowledge of Oppression*

Participants stated that racial allies are knowledgeable about the systemic and social inequalities BIPOC face due to racism, including an acute awareness of the oppressive forces that are impacting specific communities. For example, many of the Black participants urged allies to have critical knowledge about the history of policing in Black communities before taking informed action. Many participants also identified that racial allies need to understand the historical role of white supremacy, slavery, and colonization on current societal structures in the United States, but also globally. Fred, a 21-year-old Black man, explained: "White allies probably need to have a lot more integrity when it comes to acknowledging the history of, not just the U.S., but the world when it comes to the oppression of racial groups … the history of colonization essentially." Finally, participants described that allies recognize the discriminatory and prejudicial treatment of others in both overt and more insidious ways (i.e., microaggressions).

## Accountability

BIPOC in our sample stated that racial allies find and engage in opportunities to be accountable to racial equity by taking consistent steps to address the harm caused by interpersonal and systemic racism. As a result, participants described allies as reliable and dependable. Participants identified three accountability structures racial allies practice, including: (a) perseverance ($n = 15$), (b) collaboration ($n = 14$), and (c) receptive to feedback ($n = 10$).

### *Perseverance*

Participants described that racial allies understand that liberation does not occur overnight or emerges from small and inconsistent actions. Racial justice requires time and perseverance, necessitating allies to be steadfast in their antiracist work. Giselle, a 22-year-old Black woman, expressed such when sharing what she perceived to be the most important quality in a racial ally:

> There [are] years of suppression that this country has, and it's not going to be easy. It's going to take years to even get close to where we want to be … And you can't be sensitive, because you're going to be seeing the worst that we deal with, but you can't let that hinder your progress. You got to keep going.

Giselle's description encapsulates the quintessence of this subcategory that despite hardships, an ally is prepared to fight for racial justice until liberation is fully realized.

### *Collaboration*

Collaboration with BIPOC emerged as another accountability structure defined by our sample. Several participants expressed that allies understand the importance of community and collaboration in racial justice work. Participants identified that White allies need the knowledge, experiences, and leadership of BIPOC to engage in meaningful racial allyship to affect change. For example, Tasha B., a 21-year-old Black woman, stated:

> There's always going to be some type of differences … But when it comes to allyship, it's races coming together … like, what are your strengths, what are our strengths, and how do we come together as a team to make, this sounds so cliché, the world a better place.

Tasha B.'s response highlights the significance of racial allies partnering with BIPOC communities to address racial inequality. However, many participants specified further that racial allies do not center themselves in the process of collaboration. John Doe clarified that allies should not be the loudest voice in racial justice movements, nor do they speak for BIPOC:

> I would say that racial allies should also know they should be a supportive voice, but they shouldn't be the main voice … A lot of times, people in the majority can become louder. They can become the main voice of the minority cause.

Like many others, John Doe and Tasha B.'s responses highlight that there is an element of building trust in the process of collaboration. However, collaboration was coded as an accountability structure because participants' responses indicated that those who have been harmed by systemic racism (i.e., BIPOC) have the right to determine what that accountability looks like—emphasizing the importance of working in partnership with BIPOC communities.

### *Receptive to Feedback*

Finally, participants identified that racial allies hold themselves accountable to their allyship by being able to receive feedback without resorting to tears, defensiveness, or overpersonalization. Korra emphasized how allies in her life can accept direct feedback from her when they say something that may be offensive: "If something does come up like that, I'll check him, like, 'that's not okay,' and he'll say, 'Oh, I'm sorry. I'll try to keep that in mind next time' … And when you check them, they learn from it." Notably, many participants acknowledged that allies will make mistakes. However, racial allies are responsible for acknowledging their mistakes, learning from them, and implementing changes in behavior based on feedback. Similarly, some participants indicated that racial allies need to sit with and genuinely reflect on feedback before being moved toward action or repair.

## Communicating and Disseminating Information

BIPOC in our sample shared several ways that racial allies can communicate and disseminate antiracist information. Participants observed that the racial allies in their lives were willing to engage in conversations about race and racism at personal and institutional levels. Moreover, racial allies engaged in these often emotionally difficult conversations with people both within and outside their racial group. We identified two subcategories from the data: (a) demonstrate effective communication skills ($n$ = 22) and (b) engage others ($n$ = 10).

### *Demonstrate Effective Communication Skills*

Participants reported that racial allies employ several effective communication strategies in their allyship and antiracist work. Some participants emphasized that racial allies are explicit and direct in their communication regarding racism and racial justice. Especially when speaking to individuals who hold power, participants described that allies speak with confidence and hold their ground. Many also stressed the importance of allies being able to clearly communicate their thoughts and ideas. PH, a 41-year-old Latino man, stated, "I think you have to be a very good communicator, very well-spoken, somebody that can make themselves understood very easily, especially with, obviously, the other race they're being allied with."

Like PH, many participants described communication skills that would signify an alliance grounded in trust and safety for BIPOC. For example, participants stated that allies communicate without causing harm. Others explained that allies can differentiate between moments when they should speak and moments when they should listen. In cases where trust has already been established, some participants suggested that allies take opportunities to ask questions of BIPOC individuals in a respectful manner and when appropriate.

### *Engage Others*

Participants shared that racial allies were expected to engage White people in antiracism work to sustain and expand the network of racial allies. Participants suggested workshops, discussion groups, book clubs, and community engagement projects as meaningful ways to educate other individuals on how to support the liberation movements in BIPOC communities. Group discussions highlighted examples of White allies actively challenging others to recognize their privilege, and to become more aware of the consequences and realities of those privileges. During a conversation on the role of White allies, Jamaal, a 21-year-old Black man, stated:

> They use their privilege as a vessel to get information out, and for other people of the same race to see things from a different point of view … because sometimes when somebody that's like you is telling you about something, you're more receptive to it.

Similar to Jamaal's response, some participants explicitly stated that racial allies are responsible for educating other White people. Alternatively, other participants maintained that racial allies should be calling in both White and BIPOC individuals to engage in antiracist work.

## Discussion

The present study expands upon and extends the current literature on racial allyship by providing a comprehensive model of white allyship from the perspective of BIPOC. Our sample described white allyship as a lifelong commitment to (a) building trust with

BIPOC, (b) engaging in antiracist action, (c) developing critical awareness, (d) building sociopolitical knowledge, (e) demonstrating accountability, and (f) communicating and disseminating antiracist information. It is notable that our findings are inclusive of the racial ally characteristics discussed in the introduction and identified in prior literature (e.g., Case, 2012; Spanierman & Smith, 2017; Williams & Sharif, 2021), but in ways that are perhaps a bit more nuanced than previously described.

For example, several studies have identified relationship building as an instrumental part of racial allyship (e.g., K. Brown & Ostrove, 2013; Suyemoto & Hochman, 2021). Participants in the present study also used the term *relationship* when discussing the dynamics with allies; however, when soliciting further descriptions, they did not express a desire for close intimacy or friendship with allies. Instead, they articulated interpersonal strategies that were a necessity for White individuals to build/rebuild trust with BIPOC that has been violated by the relentless and insidious nature of white supremacy. Building trust was the most endorsed category within our sample, demonstrating how establishing trust within the context of an ally relationship is a potentially transformative antiracist action. However, we caution White individuals from reading the word *relationship* and assuming that their proximity to BIPOC is synonymous with allyship. White individuals building relationships with BIPOC and building trust with BIPOC in order to work toward racial equity, while may be related for some, are not equivalent. Distinctions such these (i.e., relationship building vs. trust building) illustrate the importance of explicit definitions of key concepts and terms in allyship research.

Within the domain of building trust, participants emphasized that White allies can simultaneously recognize the unique differences between BIPOC and themselves, as well as a sense of shared humanity. However, White allies must be careful to not overidentify with the experiences of BIPOC. Historically, White individuals have used the assumption of a universal human experience to further marginalize BIPOC by denying their unique experiences of oppression (e.g., the *all lives matter* movement). Previous studies have found that some White allies believe they can empathize with BIPOC's experiences of racism due to their own experiences of oppression through other identities (e.g., Case, 2012). However, one form of oppression is not synonymous with another (Boushel, 2000), particularly given the inexorable nature of racism in U.S. society (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993). Consistent with participants' call for an integration of intersectional awareness in allyship practices, White allies with other marginalized identities can instead use the context of their oppression to conceptualize intersectional approaches to disrupting racism (Case et al., 2020; Spanierman & Smith, 2017).

In line with the researchers' critical inquiry framework, participants also expected White allies to practice critical awareness. Given that recognizing privilege is central to previous definitions of allyship (e.g., Broido, 2000), it was a somewhat unexpected finding that a general self-awareness, including awareness of one's motivation for engaging in allyship, was discussed considerably more often than awareness of privilege. Many participants, like Alison, discouraged White people from joining in allyship to "prove they aren't racist." This is consistent with Helms's (2017) instrumental work, which cautions against allies operating from the pseudoindependence status of White racial identity development in the hopes of being perceived as a "good" White person.

Another nuance to our findings was that participants included specific practices for how they wanted allies to engage in critical awareness. BIPOC in our sample encouraged allies to consume information about racism with a critical lens and urged allies to challenge their white racial socialization (i.e., beliefs and actions that promote racial hierarchies; Bartoli et al., 2016). While Spanierman and Smith (2017) acknowledged that White allies may not be able to expunge racial socialization from their consciousness completely, participants in our study urge racial allies to spend considerable time reflecting on the impact of these practices on themselves and others.

As characterized by our participants, and consistent with previous literature from both BIPOC and White ally perspectives, allyship requires the integration of both internal work, such as developing knowledge and awareness, and system reformation strategies (i.e., engaging in antiracist actions; K. Brown & Ostrove, 2013; Spanierman & Smith, 2017). While listening and learning are critical for racial allies, this learning should not replace engagement in transformative actions needed to disrupt racism. One way in which White allies can engage in antiracist action is to utilize the strategies outlined by Sue et al. (2019) to address racial microaggressions across individual, institutional, and societal levels (e.g., making the metacommunication of microaggressions explicit, educating the offender, and seeking external intervention). Like Sue et al. (2019), our results support the assertion of prior work that racial allies must leverage their privilege to promote racial equity and take consistent and deliberate actions to dismantle racism (Case, 2012; Case et al., 2020; Mathew et al., 2023; Spanierman & Smith, 2017; Sue et al., 2019). Indeed, a recurring theme throughout the focus groups was the disappointment in what has been termed, *performative allyship* (Kutlaca & Radke, 2022), such as only engaging in racial justice work in superficial ways and often for personal gain. Meaningful racial allyship then necessitates that allies incorporate accountability structures in their antiracist work that acknowledges the personal responsibility and sacrifices needed to disrupt systemic racism.

Last, our qualitative results support previous findings that allies engage in conversations regarding race and demonstrate effective communication skills (Munin & Speight, 2010). Having conversations about white supremacy helps to name it, and in so doing, begin the work of dismantling it (Helms, 2017). Some participants reported that allies must be able to speak credibly about racial inequalities to people in positions of power, emphasizing the consolidation of other ally skills such as acquiring sociopolitical knowledge and critically consuming information. Our findings also indicated that White allies should use their communication skills to address racism in all white spaces and engage other White people in antiracist work. Previous research on racial allyship has consistently highlighted the importance of engaging in antiracist work within the White community as both a means to educate others (Spanierman et al., 2017; Sue et al., 2019) and to connect with other racial allies to sustain allyship work (Bishop, 2002; Case, 2012).

## Limitations

Despite the contributions of this study, the findings should be interpreted in light of some limitations. First, our data included one focus group that consisted of only two individuals. The researchers acknowledge that the lack of multiple perspectives in this microfocus group could have constrained the depth of discussion.

However, the coding team determined there were no notable differences in the number of codes and level of descriptions between this group and larger groups. Thus, the research team collectively decided to include the data in the coding process to accurately represent all participant narratives and perspectives. Additionally, while all focus groups were audio-recorded, the lack of video recording may have resulted in the potential loss of valuable nonverbal communication in the focus group sessions.

Despite our goal to recruit racially and culturally diverse BIPOC participants, our sample lacked diversity regarding other identities such as sexual orientation, age, and gender identity. Likely, the intersection of other identities with one's racial background would allow for a greater diversity of perceptions of racial allies. Another limitation to consider is that differences in racial identity statuses and radicalized experiences of participants were not assessed in the study and could have informed participant perspectives. We acknowledge that beyond this study, there could be a range of perspectives about racial allyship, including whether White allyship is needed. Thus, our categories may not generalize to the experiences of all BIPOC. However, generalizability is not the goal of qualitative research (Hays & Singh, 2011). Finally, it is important to note that this study's findings are limited by the subjectivities of those involved, despite intentional efforts by the research team to challenge such subjectivities.

## Implications for Research, Practice, Training, and Advocacy

With regard to research, future qualitative research can examine the nuances between different types of allyship dynamics and contexts (i.e., friends, coworkers, activists). For example, while beyond the scope of this study, participants in our sample noted some differences between White racial allies and friends. Previous allyship research has demonstrated mixed findings regarding these differences. K. T. Brown (2015) found that BIPOC did not perceive differences in interpersonal or intergroup support between their White allies and friends. Conversely, BIPOC in Ostrove and Brown's (2018) study viewed White allies as distinct from White friends on measures of affirmation and informed action. Future research can further investigate differences between White allies and White friends in the characteristics of allyship identified in this study to provide clarity on this distinction.

As noted previously, careful attention to differences in language and meaning must be utilized when continuing research on racial allyship. During the authors discussions of codes, it was brought to our attention how often we assumed shared meaning of words like *relationships* and *equality* with participants. These assumptions tended to lean toward understandings of these words that made them more palatable for White individuals and easily integrated into current systems dominated by whiteness. Upon further discussion, we recognized that these assumptions were manifestations of white supremacy in our research process and not unique to our study. Often, when there are epistemological differences, such as how White people define allyship relationships with BIPOC as opposed to how BIPOC define that relationship, the more privileged perspective is maintained. Thus, the continued centering of BIPOC perspectives in defining and exploring White allyship is crucial to interrogating ways in which white supremacy is being replicated by White allies as opposed to being dismantled. In fact, such collaboration and decentering of whiteness was explicitly called for by participants and prior BIPOC scholars (e.g., Helms, 2017; Singh, 2020).

Differences in desired allyship characteristics, or saliences of the already identified characteristics, between specific cultural groups may also be a fruitful area for further exploration. While there may be significant overlap, there may also be nuances in how different cultural groups of BIPOC perceive and expect White allies to participate in contextualized racial justice movements. In addition, the model cocreated by the researchers and participants of this study can be utilized to create a measure of white allyship that more fully operationalizes this construct. Although measures of aspects of racial allyship exist (e.g., Anti-Racism Behavioral Inventory [Pieterse et al., 2016]; Interpersonal Racial Allyship Scale [Williams & Sharif, 2021]), they do not account for all the dimensions of racial allyship identified in our study. A measure informed by the description of allyship in this study could be used to enhance our current understanding of racial allyship dynamics. Within psychology, this measure could be utilized in conjunction with other assessment tools to assess White trainees' readiness to engage in research and clinical practice in ways that centers racial justice.

Many White psychology trainees can be exposed to discussions of racism for the first time through their BIPOC clients, leaving them unprepared to discuss and identify systemic oppression with those clients. However, discussions of allyship characteristics included in supervisory and training experiences may prevent White therapists and trainees from engaging in interventions that can cause harm in addition to presenting opportunities for these individuals to discuss taking accountability when harmful mistakes are made. Relatedly, countless studies have demonstrated that White counselors' racial identity development can affect their multicultural competence (e.g., Johnson & Jackson Williams, 2015) and their ability to form a productive working alliance with clients (e.g., Burkard et al., 1999). Allyship development considers an individual's racial identity development and other critical components that can allow for therapeutic relationship building. For example, our subcategories of empathy, humility, effective communication skills, respecting boundaries, openness to feedback, and recognizing differences have all been identified as skill sets of effective therapists (Wampold, 2011). Ultimately, further research on White allyship in a therapeutic context is needed to address these implications.

Notably, the categories that emerged from our study are consistent with the American Psychological Association Multicultural Guidelines (Clauss-Ehlers et al., 2019). For example, critical awareness maps onto Guidelines 5, which specifically calls for an awareness of societal privilege and oppression, as well as corresponding action to address barriers and inequities. Likewise, developing critical awareness of oneself at personal, cultural, and professional levels is consistent with the competency benchmark of reflective practice (Fouad et al., 2009) and BIPOC scholars' (e.g., Helms, 1990, 2017) assertion that White psychologists can better attune to the cultural experiences of clients by first critically examining their own cultural and social identities through reflective practice strategies.

Our findings also have implications for training and advocacy. For instance, our model of White allyship can be incorporated into a myriad of trainings that engage interpersonal and/or systemic change (not just diversity-focused trainings). Discussions on White allyship and how White individuals can better engage racial equity can be integrated in trainings on mentorship, organizational climate,

interpersonal effectiveness, or any other trainings that occur in multicultural spaces. This model of allyship can also be used as a tool on college campuses to bring catalyst opportunities for ally development instead of relying on chance encounters that are often initiated in response to harm to BIPOC. Findings from previous work support this hypothesis by demonstrating that participation in formal diversity experiences predicted higher levels of appreciation for diversity even after controlling for entrance diversity attitudes (Spanierman et al., 2008). Within psychology, this framework of racial allyship can be integrated into multicultural counseling courses. Students would benefit from critical discussion of white racial socialization practices that are imbued in the field of counseling psychology and other predominantly white institutions. Moreover, this model could inform White psychologists' understanding of their strengths and areas for growth in their ally development.

Finally, BIPOC in our sample called for White allies to engage in individual and systemic actions to disrupt racism and promote equity. There are already several calls within counseling psychology (e.g., Hargons et al., 2017), and other disciplines (e.g., Toporek et al., 2009) to expand our roles as psychologists to include advocacy strategies that impact systemic change. For example, collaboration, as defined by our sample, aligns with the community collaboration domain of the American Counseling Association's Advocacy Competencies in which counselors work to develop alliances with communities and groups working for change (Toporek et al., 2009). Furthermore, calls for counseling psychologists to engage in political careers and lobby for racial justice initiatives (e.g., Hargons et al., 2017) are directly aligned with BIPOC participants' desire for White allies to engage in systemic actions to address racism.

## Conclusion

By centering the perspectives of BIPOC in characterizing racial allyship, our findings point to several avenues through which White counseling psychologists, and White individuals across all disciplines and spaces, can continuously build on their racial allyship in meaningful ways. As articulated by our participants, allyship is not a self-proclaimed identity but instead a lifelong process that necessitates (a) building trust with BIPOC, (b) engaging in antiracist action, (c) developing critical awareness, (d) building sociopolitical knowledge, (e) demonstrating accountability, and (f) communicating and disseminating antiracist information. Freire (1972) maintained that the oppression of one is tied to the oppression of all, and only in solidarity and fellowship can there be true liberation. We contend that racial allyship, as described by BIPOC in this study, is one of many paths toward collective liberation.

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Received July 25, 2022
Revision received July 22, 2023
Accepted August 13, 2023 ■

# Correction to "Defining Racial Allies: A Qualitative Investigation of White Allyship From the Perspective of People of Color" by Hinger et al. (2023)

In the article "Defining Racial Allies: A Qualitative Investigation of White Allyship From the Perspective of People of Color," by Cassandra L. Hinger, Cirleen DeBlaere, Rebecca Gwira, Michelle Aiello, Arash Punjwani, Laura Cobourne, Ngoc Tran, Madison Lord, Jordan Mike, and Carlton Green (*Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 2023, Vol. 70, No. 6, pp. 631–644, https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000709), an additional citation was added for the structure of the definition of White allies in the second paragraph of the introduction. The sentence now reads, "A review of interdisciplinary literature supports Spanierman and Smith's (2017) prior outline of defining characteristics of White allies,[3] such that White allies (a) demonstrate a knowledge and awareness of power, privilege, and oppression, particularly the historical legacy of racism and white privilege (Reason et al., 2005; Smith & Redington, 2010); (b) engage in continuous self-reflection regarding their own white racial identity, positionality, and ways in which they may be perpetuating racism (Case, 2012; Helms, 2017; Reason et al., 2005; Spanierman & Smith, 2017; Williams & Sharif, 2021); (c) leverage their racial privilege to engage in transformative antiracist actions at individual and systemic levels (K. Brown & Ostrove, 2013; Case, 2012; Kendi, 2019; Kivel, 2017; Spanierman & Smith, 2017); (d) work in solidarity with BIPOC individuals and communities (Boutte & Jackson, 2014; Spanierman & Smith, 2017); and (e) intentionally engage other White individuals in antiracist work and challenging white privilege (Goodman, 2011; Reason et al., 2005; Williams & Sharif, 2021)." The online version of this article has been corrected.

https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000741