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Racial Justice Allyship in White Non-Adopted Individuals with Adopted Siblings of Color

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Abstract

The ongoing prevalence of racial injustice in the United States demonstrates the growing importance of White allies and co-conspirators supporting people of Color to combat the social systems which consistently favor White individuals and disadvantage people of Color. While recent psychological research on allyship has touched on issues of racial injustice, a gap in research on transracial adoption and its impact on allyship presents an opportunity for further knowledge and progress to be made. Bridging research on transracial adoption, outgroup ally development, and factors that affect racial attitudes, the research presented in this study examines predictors of racial justice allyship among non-adopted White individuals who have an adopted sibling of Color. We hypothesize that being raised with and internalizing colorblind racial attitudes will be related to decreased racial justice allyship, and that a sense of closeness with one's adopted siblings, as indicated by the inclusion of the adopted sibling of Color in one's sense of self, will be related to increased allyship. To test this, a sample of White non-adopted individuals with adopted siblings of Color will be recruited from a variety of adoption-focused organizations to complete a survey on adoption experiences and racial attitudes. The results of this study will provide insights into the ways in which colorblind racial attitudes and close relationships across ethnic and racial lines can impact racial justice allyship, thus allowing for future progress in developing settings in which allyship can be increased on a large scale.

Keywords: Transracial Adoption, Allyship, Racial Justice Allyship, Close Relationships, Colorblind Racial Attitudes

Racial Justice Allyship in White Non-Adopted Individuals with Adopted Siblings of Color

We are currently in a place in history and in society where discussions surrounding racial justice, outgroup allyship, and White people working on behalf of racial justice causes are occurring to an extent that they never have before. As the contemplation of what factors contribute to or predict allyship in White people becomes more popular as the subject of contemporary research, examining allyship in more specific populations seems an ideal option to discover how and why certain individuals become allies while others do not. As I personally considered the varied experiences related to allyship, I began to think about the very unique population of White people who have an adopted sibling or adopted siblings of Color. As part of this population, I have reflected on my increased sense of responsibility in addressing and reducing racial inequities in social systems and institutions, and I have wondered why it is that some non-adopted siblings to transracially adopted children of Color grow up to be allies while others do not. Despite the shared experience of being intimately connected with people of Color, outcomes differ among White non-adopted siblings, and this research aims to analyze the factors that are related to those different outcomes.

While there is virtually no research on the relationship between allyship and the experience of having an adopted Black sibling, a single thesis project has provided some data on the impact of transracial adoption on White non-adopted siblings. Using qualitative methods, Hardeman (2010) demonstrated that non-adopted siblings felt more comfortable engaging Black people in their inner circles and felt more aware of racial injustices towards Black people than White individuals who did not grow up with Black adopted siblings. The current study will build upon these findings and provide new insights by examining the related construct of racial justice allyship through a quantitative approach with non-adopted White individuals as participants.

Examining allyship through the empirical lens of quantitative psychological research is a relatively new phenomenon (Reason, Millar, & Scales, 2005), but previous research has examined factors contributing to racial attitudes in general, and this research informs much of our empirical approach in this study. This research includes various studies on the impact of close relationships with outgroup members on racial attitudes. In conducting research on this subject, Gulker and Monteith (2013) found that establishing a potent link with only one outgroup member can reduce explicit and implicit prejudice towards the outgroup as a whole. Similarly, Bohmert and Demaris (2014) found that growing up in racially diverse neighborhoods, and specifically engaging in interracial friendships, can increase feelings of commonality with minorities. Further, research on intergroup contact indicates that cooperation between ingroup and outgroup members along with decategorization or the establishment of common identity can reduce bias and increase positive perceptions of outgroup members (Gaertner, Dovidio, & Bachman, 1996; Gaertner, Dovidio, Geurra, Hehman, & Saguy, 2016).

One possible explanation for the positive role of contact on intergroup attitudes concerns the inclusion of other in self. Originally utilized by Aron and colleagues (1992) to understand how partners in a dyad connect, inclusion of other in self suggests that partners can vary in their connection with one another, ranging from a state where the selves exist independently to a state where they are more merged and where a partner's self gets included in one's own sense of self. More recently, inclusion of other in self has been used to better understand intergroup relationships and how contact between members of outgroups can produce positive outcomes. For example, recent research on the inclusion of other in self and self-expansion indicates that becoming close with an outgroup member can allow one to adopt that other's social identities into their own identity, thus leading the individual to attribute positive biases to the other's

identity in the same way they would provide themselves with these benefits (Wright, Aron, & Tropp, 2002). Furthermore, the discovery that a greater extent of inclusion of other in self predicts a greater reduction in prejudice towards the other's outgroup indicates that increased closeness can contribute to improved attitudes and actions towards the outgroup as a whole (Wright et. al., 2002). Given these findings, we expect that White non-adopted siblings who report more closeness to their adopted siblings of Color will be more likely to engage in action on behalf of the larger outgroup and will thus behave as White allies.

Because research on prejudice does not entirely equate with the examination of racial justice allyship, the current study must bridge the gap between existing research on the impact of contact on intergroup prejudice and the less prevalent research on allied behaviors. Previous findings indicate that, because thoughts and feelings are predictive of racial attitudes, intergroup contact that contributes to prejudice reduction may expand beyond attitudes and feelings into affirmative actions on behalf of outgroups (Haddock & Zanna, 1993). With this, there is reason to believe that the inclusion of other in self should not only predict positive attitudes but allied behaviors as well.

In addition to examining the role that inclusion of other in self may play in allyship for non-adopted White individuals with adopted siblings of Color, the current study also examines the role of colorblind racial attitudes on allyship in these same individuals. Individuals with colorblind racial attitudes subscribe to the belief that race should not and does not matter, and their actions align with this belief through their views on race as an invisible characteristic and their unwillingness to discuss race (Neville & Lee, 2000). In more recent years, researchers have examined this ideology further by making connections between colorblindness and prejudice. For example, a study examining individuals who prefer All Lives Matter (ALM) to Black Lives

Matter (BLM) found that colorblind ideologies and decreased recognition of contemporary discrimination contribute to increased support for ALM over BLM (West, Greenland, & Laar, 2021). In addition to contributing to attitudes and opinions on racial justice issues, research indicates that racial colorblindness correlates with a decreased likelihood of taking action to address prejudice (Yi, Todd, & Mekawi, 2020). With regard specifically to colorblindness in the context of transracial adoption, recent research found that transracially adoptive parents who endorse colorblind racial attitudes also recognize discrimination and prejudice that negatively impacts their adopted child of Color less than parents who do not endorse colorblindness (Morgan & Langrehr, 2019). These findings are significant in their implications regarding the consequences of colorblind ideologies, but also in their contributions to future investigations of the ways in which racial colorblindness can move beyond influencing attitudes into potentially influencing the behaviors of individuals.

Beyond simply understanding colorblind racial attitudes as predictive of prejudice and potential allyship in oneself, previous research has examined the ways in which parent attitudes can impact or inform racial attitudes in their children. A recent study examining colorblindness in parents and children found an interesting lack of correlation between parents' colorblind attitudes and their children's colorblind attitudes (Pahlke, Bigler, & Suizzo, 2012). Given this surprising independence and the seemingly contradictory idea that home environments often shape children's understanding of the world, we were interested in examining whether perceived parent attitudes regarding colorblindness function in different ways in their link with allyship from participant attitudes.

In examining both close contact and colorblind ideologies in relation to racial justice allyship in White non-adopted siblings to adopted children of Color, this study is contextualized

by various growing fields of research. Based on findings from these areas of scholarship, we predicted that for non-adopted White participants who have an adopted sibling of Color colorblind racial attitudes would be negatively related to racial justice allyship and that closeness with one's adopted sibling(s) of Color would be positively related to racial justice allyship.

Methods

To test our hypothesis, we administered an online survey to eligible participants over a two-month period.

Participants

Thirty-four participants who identified as White and had an adopted sibling of Color completed the study. Of these 34 participants, eight identified as male and 25 identified as female, while one participant did not provide a response regarding their gender identity. The ages of participants ranged from 16 to 57, and the average age was 25 ($SD = 9.5$). Out of the 34 participants, only 22 completed all measures included in the survey, thus resulting in a smaller sample size utilized in the statistical analyses conducted for this study.

Participants in this study included White-identifying individuals over the age of 18 who had at least one adopted sibling of Color. To recruit participants for this study, we contacted organizations associated with adoptive families. This included organizations directly involved in the adoption process as well as organizations focused on providing post-adoption support and services. We also relied upon online groups related to transracial adoption to distribute the survey. In these online groups for members of transracially adoptive families, we asked that parents to transracially adopted children pass on the survey to their non-adopted White children, and we also asked that transracially adopted children pass on the survey to their non-adopted White siblings. Beyond these efforts, we utilized snowball sampling and requested that

participants send the link to the survey to any other eligible individuals who they knew could participate in the study.

Measures

To assess how having a Black adopted sibling impacts racial justice allyship in non-adopted White individuals, we included various measures in the online survey regarding the participant's closeness with their adopted sibling, the extent of the participant's colorblind racial attitudes, the participant's perception of their parents' colorblind racial attitudes, and the various indicators of the participant's level of racial justice allyship. Indicators of racial justice allyship included their awareness of and willingness to confront their own White privilege, as well as their self-rated involvement in allyship behaviors.

Predictor Variables

To measure closeness with adopted sibling, we used the Inclusion of Other in Self Scale (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). Participants were presented with the seven pictures included in this measure and were asked to indicate which picture best represented their relationship with their adopted sibling of Color (See *Figure 1*). For example, if the participant selects Picture 1, because the circle representing their self and the circle representing their adopted sibling are completely independent with no overlap, the participant is indicating that their adopted sibling is not included at all in their self-schema. In contrast, if the participant selects Picture 7, because the two circles are almost completely united, the participant is indicating that their adopted sibling informs most of their sense of self. Because we had a small sample size and because the data on this item were positively skewed ($M = 4.69$, $Mdn = 5.00$), we dichotomized the variable. We recoded all responses on this measure so that selecting pictures 1, 2, 3, or 4 resulted in a recoded score of 0 ($N = 14$), while selecting pictures 5, 6, or 7 resulted in a recoded score of 1 (N

= 18). We utilized these recoded scores and treated Inclusion of Other in Self as a dichotomous variable in all statistical analyses conducted after data collection.

To measure the participant's colorblind racial attitudes, we used two different scales. The Color Evasion Subscale, which is part of the Acceptability of Racial Microaggressions Scale (Mekawi & Todd, 2018), includes 11 items that assess the extent of participants' avoidance of recognizing race by asking participants to indicate whether they agree or disagree with statements such as, "I don't see your race, I see you as a person." With this measure, we utilized a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 5 = *Strongly Agree*). The reliability analyses conducted for this measure showed the Color Evasion Subscale to be highly reliable ($\alpha = 0.92$, $M = 2.61$, $SD = 0.97$). To measure participants' perceptions of their parents' colorblind racial attitudes, we also included an adapted version of Mekawi and Todd's (2018) Deemphasizing Race/Emphasizing Sameness Scale (DRESS). This measure includes 5 items that ask participants to indicate how much they endorse statements such as, "People should not see race anymore." For the purpose of this study, we modified instructions so that participants responded to the items based on how they assume their parents would answer the items. For this measure, we used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 5 = *Strongly Agree*). The reliability analyses showed the adapted DRESS Scale to be highly reliable ($\alpha = 0.85$, $M = 3.19$, $SD = 1.13$).

Outcome Variables

We examined three aspects of racial justice allyship for participants in this study to gain a comprehensive understanding of racial justice allyship with the participants. First, we assessed whether participants expressed willingness to recognize their own White privilege, as this recognition demonstrates the foundation or first step of allyship. The White Privilege Awareness Subscale, which is part of the White Privilege Attitudes Scale (Pinterits, Poteat, & Spanierman,

2009), includes 4 items that require participants to rate their agreement or disagreement with statements such as, “White people have it easier than people of Color.” With this measure, we utilized a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 5 = *Strongly Agree*). The reliability analyses conducted for the White Privilege Awareness Subscale showed this scale to be highly reliable ($\alpha = 0.84$, $M = 4.07$, $SD = 0.85$).

Second, we included an attitudinal measure of the participant’s willingness or intention to confront their White privilege. To analyze the attitudinal aspect of allyship, we used the Willingness to Confront White Privilege Subscale, which is also part of the White Privilege Attitudes Scale (Pinterits et. a., 2009). This measure includes 12 items that ask participants to rate their agreement or disagreement with statements such as, “I accept responsibility to change White privilege.” With this measure, we used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 5 = *Strongly Agree*). The reliability analyses showed the Willingness to Confront White Privilege Subscale to be highly reliable ($\alpha = 0.95$, $M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.71$).

The third aspect of allyship involved a behavioral measure which assessed whether participants actually engaged in actions to reduce or address racial injustice. To assess allied behaviors, we used a recently developed measure of ally activism (Fingerhut & Hardy, 2019). This measure includes 17 items that ask participants to rate how often they engage in behaviors such as, “Attend meetings for organizations that support racial justice.” For our measure of ally activism, we used a 4-point Likert scale in which participants selected 1 – Never, 2 – Rarely, 3 – Periodically, or 4 – Often. Because we had a small sample size and we inferred that there was likely an insignificant difference between the levels of engagement characterized by scores of 1 and 2, and similarly between scores of 3 and 4, we dichotomized the variable. In all statistical analyses involving this measure of ally activism, responses of 1 and 2 were recoded as 0 while

responses of 3 and 4 were recoded as 1, and the sum of these recoded scores was used to indicate the extent to which participants engaged in allied behaviors ($M = 7.00$, $SD = 5.17$).

Procedure

The online survey took approximately 10-15 minutes for participants to complete, and no in-person interaction with the participants occurred for this study. At the start of the survey, participants were informed that they would receive no incentives for participating in the study, their responses were completely anonymous, and they could stop the survey at any point. Participants were also informed that the study would ask them questions about their experiences with their adopted sibling of Color and questions about racial attitudes, but we did not inform the participants that the survey would assess racial justice allyship until the debriefing at the end of the survey. This was to ensure that participants' responses regarding their allyship behaviors were not influenced by the perception that they were expected to respond in a certain way. Additionally, the measures included in the survey were presented in a randomized order to reduce the likelihood of order effects.

Results

Regression analyses were conducted separately for each of the three outcome measures, White Privilege Awareness, Willingness to Confront White Privilege, and Allied Behaviors. In each analysis, we included demographics variables (Age and Gender Identity) in Step 1 and then all the predictors (Color Evasion, Parent Colorblind Racial Attitudes, and Inclusion of Other in Self) simultaneously in Step 2. Color Evasion and Parent's Colorblind Attitudes were entered as Z scored variables, and the Inclusion of Other in Self variable was dummy coded with high inclusion represented by 1. Table 1 presents the full set of results.

With regard to White Privilege Awareness, a significant amount of variance was predicted by the set of predictor variables, $R^2 = 0.71$, $R^2\Delta = 0.67$, $F\Delta(3, 16) = 12.52$, $p < 0.001$. Importantly, however, an examination of the regression coefficients showed that only Color Evasion predicted White Privilege Awareness. Specifically, higher levels of Color Evasion were related to lower levels of White Privilege Awareness, $B = -.81$, $t = -4.78$, $p < .001$.

With regard to Confronting White Privilege, a significant amount of variance was predicted by the set of predictor variables, $R^2 = 0.48$, $R^2\Delta = 0.47$, $F\Delta(3, 16) = 4.87$, $p < 0.05$. Importantly, however, an examination of the regression coefficients showed that only Color Evasion predicted Willingness to Confront White Privilege. Specifically, similar to the results found with Color Evasion and White Privilege Awareness, higher levels of Color Evasion were related to lower levels of Willingness to Confront White Privilege, $B = -0.55$, $t = -2.88$, $p < 0.05$.

With regard to Allied Behaviors, a significant amount of variance was predicted by the set of predictor variables, $R^2 = 0.50$, $R^2\Delta = 0.35$, $F\Delta(3, 16) =$, $p < 0.05$. Importantly, however, an examination of the regression coefficients showed that only Color Evasion predicted Allied Behaviors. Just as we found that higher levels of Color Evasion predicted higher levels of White Privilege Awareness and Willingness to Confront White Privilege, higher levels of Color Evasion were related to lower levels of Allied Behaviors, $B = -2.95$, $t = -2.11$, $p < 0.1$.

Discussion

This study shows that, in non-adopted White individuals who have an adopted sibling of Color, colorblind racial attitudes are related to decreased awareness of White privilege, decreased willingness to confront White privilege, and decreased allyship behaviors. Increased Color Evasion is significantly predictive of decreased racial justice allyship, and this finding aligns with our initial hypothesis that increased colorblindness will correlate with decreased allyship as

we utilized Color Evasion as an indicator of colorblindness. This finding also provides support for the idea that colorblindness is an ineffective mindset in attempts to decrease racial injustice or racial prejudices. Because colorblind racial attitudes were related to decreased awareness of one's privilege as a White individual, decreased willingness to confront one's White privilege, and decreased engagement in ally activism, we concluded that increased colorblindness does not appear to contribute to progress in combatting racial injustice and inequity. If one is unaware of their own privilege and does not engage in activities tackling that privilege, they cannot contribute to decreased racial injustice and discriminatory practices because they will simply be unable to acknowledge that those injustices exist and occur often in our society. Thus, this research can also provide insights that will allow individuals to recognize that adopting a colorblind mindset regarding race will not be productive if their aim is to decrease race-related tension, conflict, or discrimination.

We did not find the same strength or significance of relationship between parent colorblind racial attitudes and participants' racial justice allyship. Just as previous research indicates that parent colorblind attitudes are not necessarily predictive of their children's colorblindness (Pahlke, Bigler, & Suizzo, 2012), the current study found the relationship between parent colorblind attitudes and their child's racial justice allyship was much weaker than the relationship between the participant's colorblindness and their own racial justice allyship, and these results provide support for the idea that parent colorblind racial attitudes are not able to be equated with their child's colorblind racial attitudes. Due to the small size of the sample used in this study, we can speculate that this relationship could become significant if a larger sample had been used. However, the current data indicate that, with non-adopted White-identifying individuals who have an adopted sibling of Color, the colorblind racial attitudes of one's parents

are not determinant of one's ability to recognize their White privilege, willingness to confront their White privilege, or engagement in ally activism.

With our measure of closeness between participants and their adopted sibling of Color, we did not find closeness to be a significant or strong predictor of overall allyship. These results did not align with our initial hypothesis that increased closeness would be related to increased allyship. In beginning this research, the initial point of interest in our hypothesis was the potential relationship between closeness with adopted sibling and racial justice allyship. Based on previous research which suggests that close contact across racial and ethnic lines can positively impact racial attitudes, we had hoped that we would find the close relationship between adopted and non-adopted siblings would provide similar results to these previous studies. While the finding that increased closeness is not predictive of allyship in non-adopted White siblings was not anticipated, as stated with results on parent colorblind racial attitudes and racial justice allyship, these findings on closeness to adopted sibling and allyship could potentially be altered if a much larger sample size had been utilized. In future studies, including a much larger group of participants can provide the potential for clearer results. However, the limitations inherent to the specificity of the target population, the relatively short 2-month data collection period, and the difficulties experienced contacting organizations willing to distribute a survey to non-adopted siblings to transracially adopted children did not allow for a large sample or ideal results in the current study.

The findings from this study provide novel insights into the understudied population of non-adopted siblings and allow us to make connections between factors that have not yet been studied alongside each other. Most notably, this study contributes to future research in the field of adoption research by encouraging a broader perspective on the impact of transracial adoption,

one that would account for the experiences of adoptees, adoptive parents, and non-adopted siblings. While previous studies have examined the impact of transracial adoption on adoptees and on adoptive parents (Hollingsworth, 1997; Lee, 2003; Padilla, Vargas, & Chavez, 2010), they have not included analyses of non-adopted siblings, and the current study thus provides new insights that can be built upon in future research. Additionally, this study contributes to future research on the impact of close relationships on racial attitudes and adds to the new and rapidly advancing field of allyship research by examining factors that can contribute to allyship development. Previous studies have not examined the relationship between colorblind racial attitudes and racial justice allyship, so while the current study did not find a link between close contact with people of Color and allyship, the findings related to colorblindness and allyship provide the framework for future studies to further examine the negative impacts of colorblind racial attitudes as well as the factors that can impact allyship. Additionally, as the current study combined the White Privilege Awareness Subscale, the Willingness to Confront White Privilege Subscale, and a measure of ally activism to encapsulate the construct of racial justice allyship, this study opens the door for future researchers to examine other potential means of defining and measuring allyship in psychological or empirical research more generally.

This study also has the potential to benefit the world outside the field of psychological and adoption research as it contributes to a deeper understanding of allyship. By discovering which factors contribute to increased racial justice allyship, we can move forward with knowledge that will allow us to foster environments and situations in which conditions such as close contact with outgroup members or decreased advocacy for the colorblind racial attitude perspective can increase allyship in White individuals. Although the current study did not find a relationship between closeness with one's adopted sibling of Color and increased allyship,

previous research on the positive impact of close contact with outgroup members provides support for the idea that fostering diverse environments and close relationships between different racial and ethnic groups can reduce racial prejudice and increase one's willingness to provide support for people of Color. As decreased prejudice and increased support for or involvement in movements to increase equity for people of Color are significant aspects of racial justice allyship, the promotion of close contact with diverse individuals and groups can potentially contribute to increased allyship in White individuals. Furthermore, because the current study did find a significant relationship between increased colorblind racial attitudes and decreased racial justice allyship, the discouragement of colorblindness as a mindset utilized by White individuals to address racial injustice can contribute to increased allyship through increased awareness of White privilege and active engagement in allyship behaviors. By bolstering our understanding of the positive impact of close relationships across racial and ethnic lines and the negative impact of colorblind racial attitudes, we can move forward with knowledge that will allow us to effectively increase opportunities for racial justice allyship to occur.

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Table 1

Regression Analyses Regarding White Privilege Awareness, Confronting White Privilege, and Allied Behaviors.

Model		White Privilege Awareness			Confronting White Privilege			Allied Behaviors		
		B	SE	t	B	SE	t	B	SE	t
1	Constant	3.92	0.36	10.78***	3.92	0.31	12.73***	4.21	2.19	1.92†
	Age	0.10	0.19	0.55	0.04	0.16	0.27	-0.72	1.13	-0.64
	Female	0.27	0.43	0.62	0.13	0.36	0.37	3.70	2.57	1.44
2	Constant	3.91	0.28	13.77***	3.86	0.32	12.13***	2.23	2.34	0.95
	Age	0.00	0.12	0.03	-0.01	0.14	-0.09	-0.60	1.00	-0.59
	Female	0.43	0.29	1.45	0.26	0.33	0.79	4.78	2.42	1.98†
	Color Evasion	-0.81	0.17	-4.78***	-0.55	0.19	-2.88**	-2.95	1.40	-2.11†
	Perceived Parents' Colorblind Attitudes	0.12	0.18	0.63	0.05	0.21	0.25	-0.48	1.51	-0.31
	Inclusion of Other in Self	-0.10	0.25	-0.40	0.01	0.29	0.03	2.67	2.09	1.27

† $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Figure 1

Inclusion of Other in Self Scale (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992)

