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# The White Ally Experience: A Look Into the Impacts of Being a White Ally

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**The White Ally Experience: A Look Into the Impacts of Being a White Ally**

Kristen Maclin

Master's Thesis

May 2022

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### **Abstract**

If an ally knew what they would experience, would they be more willing to stand up? Racism, institutional racism, racial bias, discrimination, and microaggressions have existed in our country since its inception. One way to work to overcome these is by growing allyship and having allies who are willing to speak up and stand beside marginalized groups. This research study addressed what allyship means, the byproducts of racist structures that allies have encountered, ally burnout, and ways to overcome burnout. These were researched through surveys from BIPOCs, named allies, and my school colleague populations. My research found that many White participants who identified as an ally or were called allies have experienced byproducts of racist structures and burnout and have developed strategies to overcome the burnout.

*Keywords:* racism, allyship, burnout

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Imagine if you knew that you were going to walk into a room where you would be targeted, shamed, made fun of, disregarded, and gossiped about. Would you walk in? Would you willingly take on the fight for a good cause? The question guiding this study is if an ally knew what they would experience, would they still stand up?

Most of the time, when an ally stands up for Black, Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC), they do not think they will experience backlash from their peers (Gorski, 2019). Although allies did not anticipate backlash, Gorski's study identified backlash as a reason for burnout. In many cases, the allies who stand up for BIPOCs experience secondary byproducts of racist structures and attitudes. Though it happens, it by no means is at the same level or comparable to what BIPOCs experience daily.

The purpose of this study examined whether knowing strategies to overcome burnout and obstacles that allies may face would empower allies to stand up. Identifying and implementing strategies for burnout could make a big difference when working toward racial equity. To address the growing and strengthening of allyship, I utilized a variety of methods to collect data, including: sampling, surveying, and interviewing techniques. I first focused on finding White allies by asking BIPOCs within the field of education who they would consider an ally. I utilized the responses from those surveys to send a divergent survey to the White allies identified and the school community I work in. I also surveyed and interviewed colleagues from my school community to get diverse perspectives. Last, I identified two White allies to conduct interviews with to gain more insight relating to the survey questions, and one of the two White allies agreed to the interview.

Through this research, I hope to build stronger allyship with existing allies and grow the number of allies willing to step into an active role of standing beside marginalized groups of people. As a person that has been named a White ally by multiple BIPOCs, I have personally experienced secondary byproducts of racist structures and attitudes. It has been something I have had to work through and continue to process as time goes on. Often, the work is hefty, and I have to take a deep breath. However, the privilege that I have is that I have the option to take that step back and breathe because I am White. BIPOCs do not have that option and deserve allies that can stand by them all the time. Through my experiences, I have had excellent mentors who have helped me determine a variety of self-care methods to avoid burnout.

This research, though vital to growing allyship and working towards racial equity within institutions, can be applied to society as a whole. Inequitable opportunities like access to wealth, employment, and adequate housing have led to achievement and opportunity gaps that plague our schools in ways that impact our youth (Lowery, 2018). Community violence filtering into schools is affecting the level of education students can get, which is, in turn, exacerbating the achievement and opportunity gaps for our youth of color. The Black lives taken too early as a result of racism continue to divide our country. As a result of smartphones, video, and social media, more public awareness has been given to lives lost, such as George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Michael Brown, and Trayvon Martin. Given these situations that our community, country, and the world have faced, now is a time to take a stand.

My seven-year-old son recently identified racial bias when he was watching the show *Them* on Netflix. He did not know that it was racial bias but noticed that something wasn't right. He asked me why all the White people were going back inside their house when the Black family came into the neighborhood. I asked him how he knew that they were responding this way to the

new family because they were Black, and he told me, "because they are the only Black family there." As a mother of biracial children, I know I am going to have to have conversations with my boys about scenarios that I never had to experience as a White person: how to respond to the police if and when they ever get pulled over, not to stand outside stores too long so people do not think they are doing things they should not, how some people may respond to them simply because of the color of their skin, and how it does not make them any less of a person. At the same time, I am also pushing them to be constructive and work harder every day because I know that if they want to achieve similar things to their White peers, they will have to overcome obstacles that their dominant race peers may not face.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

As a manifestation of an overarching White supremacist social order, institutional racism is a form of racism embedded within an organization's standard practice. By definition, "Institutional racism exists when institutions or organizations, including educational ones, have standard operating procedures (intended or unintended) that hurt members of one or more races in relation to members of the dominant race" (Brooks & Watson, 2019, p. 638). In many cases it is so embedded that it goes unnoticed because White people have been taught that the policies and systems that perpetuate institutional racism are "normal." However, BIPOCs encounter these policies and systems daily. I decided to look into *The White Ally Experience: A Look Into the Impacts of Being a White Ally of BIPOCs* because there can be a direct relationship between being an ally and experiencing byproducts of institutional racism or discrimination simply for standing beside a person of color. Overcoming these byproducts are important in order to work toward interrupting racism.

Given the minimal research on this topic, finding studies that addressed institutional racism for allies was challenging. However, I was able to find connected research regarding activism, allyship, becoming an ally, and how to interrupt racism. This literature review aims first to examine what racism and allyship are and the components that go into them. It will then explore the impacts on allies and activists for racial justice, how to become a good ally, and how White people, as allies, can interrupt racism.

### **Racism Within Leadership**

Racism has plagued the United States and negatively affected BIPOCs even before the settlers' treatment of Native Americans. Since the act of racism has been around for a long



time, there has been a lot of research on the topic. This section will discuss racism in education and racism within leadership of schools.

Racism occurs on many different levels and simultaneously. Brooks and Watson (2019) explored levels of racism by looking specifically at "organization levels of racism in education, specifically examining (a) individual racism, (b) dyadic racism, (c) subcultural racism, (d) institutional racism, and (e) societal racism" (Brooks & Watson, 2019, p. 638). Identifying individual racism requires a look at how people live and work and what racist behaviors they have likely adopted from being in racist environments. They can either hold these racist attitudes and beliefs outright or by omission in being silent, oblivious, or maintaining the status quo. Dyadic racism refers to the relationship of two people within the racist structure. Brooks and Watson (2019) explore this concerning school leadership and its role in perpetuating or eradicating racism through individual relationships within the school. Subcultural racism refers to the fact that there are different subcultures within a school. Within these subcultures, there are other leaders where interactions shape racism within the school. Next, when looking at institutional racism, we have to look at how the schools or organizations operate. Institutional racism exists when systems, policies, and practices are designed to hurt or be biased against the members of one or more nondominant races. Finally, societal racism is when "racism that has become institutionalized at this level can be seen in countless indicators of health, education, incarceration, or inequity across access and attainment" (Brooks & Watson, 2019, p. 638).

Within these levels, school leaders play an essential and integral part in the presence of racism within the school. They can either allow racism to influence their decisions, or they can be the positive influencers as to how it exists within the school. According to Brooks and

Watson (2019), previous research done by Larson and Ovando (2001) suggests that many school leaders have deficit thinking, or thinking grounded in focusing on needs, problems, and avoiding risk rather than focusing on solutions and dealing with risk. This type of thinking can perpetuate racism rather than eradicate it.

Inequity exists within school systems in many ways. One way is through microaggressions, "small slights...[that] communicate to students and faculty of color they are considered less than White students" (Brooks & Watson, 2019, p. 635). Another is through overt racist acts. In some cases, these overt racist acts are not addressed or punished. "When people exhibit racist behavior and escape punishment, it is, in essence, a double blow to the culture of racism in a system" (p. 635). When this happens, it can cause a feeling of worthlessness for students and staff of color. For these reasons, it is imperative that the leadership, whether in a school or an organization, is actively working to be anti-racist allies for BIPOCs. The way a school or organization runs is a direct reflection of leadership.

### **Critical Whiteness Studies and The White Racial Frame**

When examining racism, it is important to address critical whiteness studies and the White racial frame. These frameworks look at structures that produce White privilege and how Whiteness impacts race, culture and systematic racism. They use "a transdisciplinary approach to investigate the phenomenon of whiteness, how it is manifested, exerted, defined, recycled, transmitted, and maintained, and how it ultimately impacts the state of race relations" (Matias & Mackey, 2015, p. 34). In the book *White Fragility* (DiAngelo, 2018), DiAngelo writes that many experts in the field will say that racism exists because there is a need to have a dominant culture. In most cases, that dominant culture is White. The White dominant culture allows White people many privileges that BIPOCs do not have. White privilege is having certain

privileges solely because of the color of someone's skin. It exists in many ways "such as being accepted into a new neighborhood, using a credit card without suspicion or offering one's views without those opinions being generalized to all members of one's race" (Case, 2012, p. 78).

Case (2012) focused on this type of idea in her research. Her focus was on Whiteness's cultural context and social constructions in the United States. She looked at White privilege, critical race theory, and critical white studies. In her research, she explained, "both critical race theory and critical white studies expose the race-neutral charades and myths that perpetuate racial oppression" (Case, 2012, p. 79). To examine this, she observed and interviewed a group of White women who came together for self-initiated reflection on topics that impact racism. Through her study, she developed five main insights. First, White anti-racists need to prepare themselves for critical self-evaluation that lasts a lifetime and always be willing to evaluate their racism. Next, as a result of White privilege and Whiteness, Whites have the power to ignore the impact of race when it benefits them because their race protects them. Third, having a group where Whites can gather to discuss race is beneficial and can help keep allies energized to continue the work. As well, White people can use their White privilege to challenge racism and use it to make other Whites listen. Finally, her last insight was that there is internal conflict on personal values of racial justice and social acceptance when an ally tries to interrupt racism.

Knowing our racial past helps us to better understand our racial present. This quote is a great way of summing up where we are as a country regarding race relations. The United States has been grounded in and shaped by slavery and racial segregation, yet many White people tend to forget or disregard much of our racial history willfully. This denial of the country's racial past

and its influence on the present describes the White racial frame. Feagin (2013) defines the White racial frame as:

*An overarching White worldview that encompasses a broad and persisting set of racial stereotypes, prejudices, ideologies, images, interpretations and narrative, emotions, and reactions to language accents, as well as racialized inclinations to discriminate. (p. 3)*

When looking at research around race, it is difficult to believe the current research is an accurate analysis of racial matters because so much of the research is White dominated and "screened for conformity to preferences of elite decision-makers in academia or society generally" (Feagin, 2013, p. 4). Feagin, 2013 states that much of the research that has been done in the past has a lot of limitations and hidden assumptions. As a result, there is a limited understanding of racial inequities. In addition, research in history books, law books, and educational curriculum frames the topic of race in the United States as "race problems." This language leads to a negative connotation by making it seem like racism is a problem in an otherwise healthy system. This is important to note as part of the White racial frame because the way things are written, and the language used can lead to assumptions. Without awareness of the White racial frame, language can mislead a learner or reader to believe the way Whites think and act is the "right" way. For example, many times, racial issues are written about in passive voice, e.g., "prejudice has been a problem for African Americans" (p. 7), or use vague nouns as the subject, e.g., "society discriminates against Latinos" (p. 7). Writing like this takes away from naming who is being talked about in terms of where the problem truly lies. When writing in the passive tense, there is an assumption that race relations are not as bad as they used to be. Overall, the use of this language and the fact that research previously done does not get to the truth of the racialized society of the United States is a White racial frame.

As a result of this previous research and the language being used in the research, many social scientists are developing a new, or extended old, paradigm on racial matters that includes the perspective of scholars and activists of color that was lacking before. The social scientists working toward this shift are utilizing work from these scholars and activists of color to enhance and counter the mainstream historical traditions that had previously come from White people. This is important because by using the work of scholars and activists of color, the concepts and paradigms are less likely to be the White racial frame. Research done by Lavelle (2011) looked at how older White southerners viewed the Jim Crow era. In her interviews, she found that the older White participants thought there were "good racial relations" and felt the only time things got bad was when there were active Civil Rights protests. They stated they noticed the difference in how Blacks and Whites were treated, but they did not think there was anything wrong with it because "Back then, it was the way of life" (Feagin, 2013, p. 18). This shows the difference between the White racial frame versus the historical truth.

The White racial frame is embedded in our minds and lives consciously and unconsciously. It becomes such a major part of Whites' character structure that it manifests itself in their social environment to the point it becomes habitual. As a result of the intensity of the White character structure, these habits regularly generate discriminatory habits. The dominant racial frame is reinforced in a person's brain and implanted in the neural linkages by "repetition of elements—which are heard, observed, or acted upon repeatedly by individuals over years and decades" (Feagin, 2013, p. 15). The frame is so deeply implanted in the brain that when an alternative or counter-frame is shown, the person ignores or rejects the counter-frame even if it is historically factual. The White racial frame has become such a large part of the United States bedrock that many White people do not even realize they are working within it.

## **Racism and Bullying**

Studies have shown a link between racism and bullying. Myers and Bhopal (2017) dug into this idea by examining two rural schools in England. Their research identified three types of "mainly White schools." These include: "neighbourhoods within multi-ethnic cities where primary schools are mainly White but not necessarily secondary schools; commuter belts close to multi-ethnic cities; and almost totally White areas (urban, suburban or rural)" (Myers & Bhopal, 2017, p. 127). In their study they focused on how rural primary schools with a White majority deal with "racist bullying." Racist bullying is "bullying characterised by being consistent, ongoing, derogatory and directly related to ethnicity" (p. 131).

The study focused on two schools. Each of these schools had parents report that there were incidents of racism, but the school's Head Teacher handled racism and bullying in very different ways. In the first school, the Head Teacher tended to dismiss the racist bullying by saying things like, "I don't think you can actually say that it was racism; it was just the children--they pick on differences and so they pick on the fact that [name of child] is not White like other children in the school are" (Myers & Bhopal, 2017, p. 131). This school was worried about naming the bullying a racist act because they worried about their reputation. As a result of how the Head Teacher handled issues of racism, it filtered down to the teachers as well. A teacher in the same school was interviewed and described students' "racist language as generic bad behaviour" (p. 133).

In contrast to the first school, the second school that the study focused on had a very different view of how they handled racism and bullying. The first primary difference is that the Head Teacher at the second school admitted that they had incidents of racism within their school. This Head Teacher stated, "Yes, we have had incidents of racism and bullying in our

school and we try to deal with them effectively" (Myers & Bhopal, 2017, p. 133). She is also quoted saying, "We are not afraid to say it is bullying or racism-if that is what it is" (p. 133). When handling cases of racism and bullying, this Head Teacher named it and did not punish all parties involved. She punished the student who had been the racist and gained the trust of the parent and student who had been the victim.

Overall, in the school where racism and bullying were covered up and not named, "Parents who complained about racism and associated bullying were labeled as exaggerators and regarded suspiciously. Their behaviours were seen as a threat to the school's stability because they highlighted a link between the school population and racism" (Myers & Bhopal, 2017, p. 134). As a result of the school not identifying that racism and bullying occurred, the staff did not recognize the racism either. This perpetuated and reinforced a school culture of "White privilege and the dominance of the majority White school population" (p. 134). This study showed racist bullying within schools, but when there is a dominance of White privilege, it produces a culture of complacency. As a result, race and racism are deemed irrelevant within schools that support this culture, making White allyship all that much more difficult.

### **Allyship**

Many people who seek racial justice want to be an ally. Although we aspire to be there, there are some things to understand that come with allyship. This section discusses some key components that involve being an ally. One portion of this section includes the definition of an ally. Another is how BIPOCs describe their allies, what characteristics allies show, and how these descriptions and characteristics line up with how allies describe themselves.

The first question that needs to be answered is, what is an ally? In work done by Brown and Ostrove (2013), "allies are generally conceived as dominant group members who work to end prejudice in their personal and professional lives and relinquish social privilege conferred by their group status through their support of nondominant groups" (Brown & Ostrove, 2013, p. 2211). In looking closer at this definition, it is important to note that an ally involves more than just working with a nondominant group to end prejudice. It also means that the ally is willing to give up their social privileges to fight for justice. In addition, Singh (2019) adds to what it means to be a racial ally. She says that White allies are people who "use their White privilege to challenge everyday racism" (Singh, 2019, p. 169). She also stated that White allies have "worked hard to become more attuned to the ways that racism can show up, overtly or covertly, within yourself and within your relationships" (Singh, 2019, p. 169). Finally, White allies "signal to White friends and colleagues that you will take action to speak out and act when it comes to racism, and you signal to BIPOC that you are an advocate" (Singh, 2019, p. 169). In their work of considering what an ally is, Brown and Ostrove (2013) also describe a difference between an ally and someone who is *low prejudice*. An ally is someone willing to take action against social injustice and is willing to offer support to a nondominant group. Low-prejudice individuals have not yet moved beyond the self-regulation of prejudice and are not willing to take action. This is important to note because there are many times when people may say they are an ally because of their feelings toward injustice but do not realize that to be a true ally, the action against social injustice is necessary.

In addition to allies being willing to take action and supporting nondominant groups, people also cannot name themselves as allies. Allies hold many different characteristics, but the question is, how would BIPOCs describe and characterize allies? This is important to note



because to be an ally of BIPOCs, someone from that marginalized group has to be able to identify the person as such. In a series of studies done by Brown and Ostrove (2013), this was looked at in-depth. They looked at how BIPOCs described allies, what characteristics were possessed, how BIPOCs perceives white allies and allies of color, and how these perceptions lined up when comparing the perceptions that BIPOCs have of their allies with the self-perception of the ally.

Brown and Ostrove (2013) examined the characteristics allies possess, as described by BIPOCs, with eight major themes. These included: not noticing or treating the person of color differently because of their race/ethnicity, sharing similar experiences or interests, feelings of connection and interest or having a respectful, non-judgmental attitude, proposing possible actions to address a situation, acknowledgment of power differentials and understanding their own racial identity, being knowledgeable about or active in racial/ethnic communities besides their own, taking action among their own racial/ethnic group, and an explicit mention of friendship. When these characteristics were used to compare how BIPOCs perceived their allies and what the self-perception of the ally was, it was consistently shown that the ally rated themselves higher than the person of color on these characteristics. Brown and Ostrove (2013) explained this by looking at the actor-observer theory. This is a theory where “frequently actors and observers evaluate actors’ behavior differently. Because they have a perspective different from the actors, observers are more likely to regard actors in a way that diverges from how actors regard their own behavior” (Brown & Ostrove, 2013, p. 2217).

### **Dos and Don’ts of Allyship**

Within Singh’s (2019) work in *The Racial Healing Handbook*, she discusses what to do and not to do as an ally. The very first thing to remember is that allies do not name

themselves. She states that "self-appointment of allyship can mean we are off the mark of being a good racial ally" (Singh, 2019, p. 173). Since allyship can be difficult to navigate, Singh discusses some guidelines for engaging in helpful and healthy allyship work.

First, what should an ally do? According to Singh (2019), some factors that promote helpful and healthy allyship are: "staying humble, apologizing when you get it wrong, being a good listener, believing the experiences that BIPOCs have, continuing to educate yourself about racism, and connecting with other racial allies" (pp. 173-174). Staying humble means considering the person you are allying for when you want to act on a situation. An ally should consider what would be most helpful for this person and avoid putting the person at risk. Another "do" is to apologize when you get it wrong. As an ally, there will be mistakes. Rather than over apologizing or not apologizing at all, allies should embrace being uncomfortable when making mistakes and simply apologize and continue to grow. Next, being a good listener is an ally's role. Listening to the needs of BIPOCs about racial injustice or listening to understand is sometimes the best thing an ally can do. Next, allies need to believe in the experience of BIPOCs. Allies need to check in to see where bias restricts fully supporting, hearing, and validating BIPOCs experiences. Continuing education about racism is another important role for an ally. There is always more to learn, and White people should not expect BIPOCs to educate them on issues of racism. The ally should take the lead and educate themselves. Finally, the last "do" that Singh discusses connecting with other allies. This is important because it gives allies a space to explore privilege and sustain ways to take everyday action.

While there are many ways to be a helpful and healthy ally, external factors can also cause harm. Singh lists these as "don'ts" in her book. The first "don't" she discusses:

appointing yourself as a racial ally. This is not something allies get to name themselves. It is something that is earned based on the work that has been done and acknowledging that the ally is not all-knowing. Next, Singh discusses that allies do not pause their allyship. Healthy allies do not overcommit or overextend themselves to the work, but they also do not stand back in silence when they see racial oppression. Participating in a "call-out" culture is another don't for an ally. Allies should not shame or blame others for being unaware of their supremacy or privilege. This does not mean they ignore situations where this happens, it means they acknowledge that there is a better way to use their power to challenge racism. Next, do not talk about how you are an ally at every chance you get. People will understand a person's allyship based on their actions. Another don't is to think the ally has all the answers to solve racism and that the ally is more enlightened than fellow allies. This "don't" speaks to one of Singh's "dos" of continuing to educate and knowing there is always more to learn. Finally, Singh states the last "don't" as avoiding feelings of grief and loss. Allyship is both rewarding and hard work where a variety of feelings and emotions can arise. Knowing your emotions and having someone to talk to can be helpful and more effective for allies.

### **Impacts on Allies/Activists**

Allyship can take a mental toll on a person who is being a true ally. There are physical, emotional, and relational effects that take place. These effects stem from things that happen internally, externally and within the movement the ally is working. In a study done by Gorski (2019), these impacts were examined as well as strategies that allies and activists can do to prevent burnout.

Burnout is a common result for many activists/allies due to the type of work they engage in. Gorski (2019) examined how racial justice activists in the United States who have

experienced burnout describe what caused this burnout. Through this study, he found that burnout causes are centered around four themes. Four themes include: emotional disposition, backlash, structure, and in-movement.

Activists that struggled with emotional-dispositional causes said: "they struggle with profound personal responsibility for eliminating racism, a deep emotional relationship to racial justice, and feelings of isolation" (Gorski, 2019, p. 675). Experiencing this emotional disposition caused the activist to have an intense emotional relationship with their activism, which in turn, made them more susceptible to emotional exhaustion. The backlash was experienced by activists in a variety of ways, including professional vulnerability. Activists stated that even if their activism was not a part of their professional work, they were unable to quit the work during their job because they felt an obligation to speak up when they saw something. In addition, activists feel that they are economically vulnerable because the work of racial justice does not pay well enough to live beyond paycheck to paycheck. In addition to feeling professionally and economically vulnerable, activists stated that they felt backlash in physical ways through threats and warnings to stop their activism. The third theme that Gorski (2019) identified was structural causes. These causes "revolved around what participants characterized as the impossible task of creating change against unbendable White supremacy" (Gorski, 2019, p. 678). In addition, the structural causes were a result of interactions with White people who refused to acknowledge racism. This led to exhaustion because the activist felt they were having the same conversations over and over again. The last theme was in-movement causes. These causes tended to come from a competition of "street cred" among the activists within the same movement. The activists that experienced burnout from in-movement causes experienced them because of how the activists treated one another.

Since burnout is something that allies and activists face regularly, Gorski (2019) also discussed some strategies to help prevent burnout. These strategies were discussed around getting people to look further into community care versus self-care strategies. The shift from self-care to community-care specifically talks about the movement leaders "attending to the activist community's needs. It is not just about activists reflecting on their own martyr syndromes, but also about reflecting on how they and their organizations contribute to a martyr syndrome epidemic" (Gorski, 2019, p. 682). This shift involves looking at the cultures within the activist spaces and addressing the potential burnout as part of being an activist.

### **Becoming a Good Ally**

There has been a small amount of research done on how to become a good ally through different methods (DiAngelo, 2019; Singh, 2019). One of these methods is by participating in White Affinity groups. Another is by participating in racial prejudice reduction interventions. Finally, the last is to have positive contact with Black Americans. Although there has been limited research, all of these methods have been shown to support allyship in terms of making stronger and more action-oriented allies for BIPOCs.

The first method is being a part of a White Affinity group. "Affinity groups are an effective means through which people can reaffirm and explore aspects of their identity, as well as provide each other guidance and support for interacting with those who might not share, understand or respect that identity" (Michael & Conger, 2009, p. 56). In a scholarly article written by Michael and Conger (2009), a White Affinity group at the University of Pennsylvania was observed. Through their observations and interviews, it was found that White affinity groups benefit White allies by giving them a place to practice talking about race where they can be honest, ask questions, and process emotions. White affinity groups are also

a good resource for people to seek further knowledge about race. Finally, it gives White people a place to talk about their race and reflect on the privilege so that they can work to not perpetuate racial injustice.

Many White people benefit from a space where we can practice talking about race--a space in which we can be honest, ask possibly ignorant questions, and process our deep emotions around race, while also challenging ourselves to do better, to examine and engage in our privilege more critically. (Michael & Conger, 2009, p. 57)

Finally, White affinity groups help White people learn about themselves as a race. Within the scholarly research done by Michael & Conger (2009), participants supported this by saying “we need to know our racial selves better before we can fully participate in anti-racist work, as understanding how race works enhances our ability to counter racism in ourselves and our environment” (Michal & Conger, 2009, p. 60).

The second method that can be done to become a good ally is participating in racial prejudice reduction interventions. Hochman and Suyemoto (2020) conducted a study that was designed to develop an intervention to foster knowledge and attitudinal change in the areas of reducing prejudice and increasing interventions to promote racial justice. The participants were randomly assigned one of six interventions that focused on: imaginal contact, racism understanding and empathy, and privilege and positionality. The imaginal contact intervention asked participants to imagine a positive, friendly interaction with a person from a marginalized group to promote more positive attitudes toward the marginalized group. The intervention around racism and empathy involved a first-person narrative from a White person who had learned about racism. They included their feelings and emotions that surrounded the racist act and the participants were asked to answer reflection questions throughout. Interventions

around privilege and positionality included another first-person narrative from a White person who had learned about their White privilege and its impact on their life. The narrative also included a definition of White privilege and concrete examples. Within the reading, participants were asked to answer reflection questions. Through the study, Hochman and Suyemoto (2020) found that the interventions that were designed to reduce prejudice and increase racial justice awareness did change participants' warmth, color-blind ideology, ethnocultural empathy, and White privilege attitudes following the intervention. However, when re-evaluating this three weeks later at the follow-up mark, individuals who participated in imaginal contact intervention maintained warmth toward BIPOCs, and participants who received all interventions maintained gains in ethnocultural empathy. Overall, researchers found that "A higher dose of learning, sustained over time, may relate to greater change, especially given that ally development research supports that ally development is a continual, interactive process" (Hochman & Suyemoto, 2020, p. 747).

Finally, the last strategy that can be done to become a good ally is to have positive contact with Black Americans per Selvanathan et al. (2018). They did three separate but related studies regarding having positive interactions with Black Americans. They looked at how intergroup contact and positive contact with Black Americans predicted support for collective action or action taken by a group, and how the empathy to anger pathway worked. The empathy to anger pathway describes that this collective action is more productive when the empathy one feels for a disadvantaged group turns to anger. In turn, this promotes more action on the role of the ally or activist. Finally, they measured empathy in terms of reactive empathy by including a range of emotional terms. The results from the study found that positive contact, as well as intergroup contact, was positively associated with allies showing

collective action for racial justice. They also found that White guilt or the shame that White people feel around racial inequity associated with disadvantaged groups was associated with positive collective action, but White identification was negatively associated with collective action. In addition, they found that to have true collective action for racial justice, "empathy alone does not predict actions aimed at addressing inequality, but a combination of empathy and other emotions, such as anger, predict political action intentions" (Selvanathan et al., 2018, p. 896). They also found that "Empathy tends to promote social cohesion and prosocial behaviors, whereas anger promotes social change" (Selvanathan et al., 2018, p. 896).

### **Interrupting Racism**

One of the only ways to end racism is to interrupt it. White allies can be a support in doing this if they are truly showing allyship and being anti-racist. That being said, interrupting racism can be one of the hardest things to do. In recent studies, strategies have been discussed to support people in being anti-racist.

One of the ways people can interrupt racism is how they communicate. DeTurk's (2011) study focused on how people communicate to interrupt racism. The study found that significant power for allies emerged in different ways. The first is in terms of knowledge. Some allies stressed that "their ability to act as allies to a particular group was limited to what they knew, and spoke of the importance of educating themselves about issues faced by the groups they hoped to help" (DeTurk, 2011, p. 577). Another is in terms of speaking up. "When allies do choose to speak up from a position of relative status, they have a different range of rhetorical options than they would as targets of negative prejudice" (p. 578). This speaks to the fact that in many cases when a person of color speaks up on behalf of racial injustice they are often ignored, however when a White ally speaks up on the same issue, they



tend to be listened to. The next type of ally work is advocacy. In advocacy work, allies can serve as a liaison for less powerful groups or "run interference" on behalf of a marginalized group.

In addition, allies use their identities in different ways from interpersonal to public communication to interrupt racism. Some allies utilized political action where they "raise public awareness and challenge discrimination at the structural level" (DeTurk, 2011, p. 578). This can range from fundraising, lobbying, or organizing political events. In other situations, allies may offer "direct, concrete support by sharing information, advice, assistance, and use of material resources with individuals in need" (p. 578). Finally, they can also support on an interpersonal level and "engage in private communication to comfort or support targets in the face of discrimination, prejudice, or embarrassment as a minority group member in a particular social environment" (p. 578).

## **Conclusion**

Racism is a real public health crisis in our world. Many different levels of racism exist within organizations. These levels of racism impact BIPOCs in a variety of ways. Allyship is one way to work to dismantle racism in these structures. However, being an ally is more than just saying racism is wrong. Being an ally involves a person who is willing to communicate in ways to interrupt racism, it involves a person who is willing to give up their privileges to help marginalized groups, it involves a person who is willing to take action against racial injustices.

Through research done by many experienced and qualified people, there have been shown to be strategies that not only can build allyship in people but also support their allyship in ways they can communicate to interrupt racism. Strategies from taking and understanding the perspective of a marginalized group to have positive contact with Black Americans (or

other BIPOCs) have shown to support allyship and grow collective action against racial injustice. Although there are strategies, it does not protect the allies from burnout and racism themselves.

As a result of the research on this topic being very minimal, there is a definite need for more studies on racism that allies can face themselves. There has been research done around what some causes of activist/ally burnout can be, but there has been limited to no research done on what prejudices allies can face when they stand up for racial equity.

### Chapter 3: Methods

The purpose of this study was to investigate if knowing obstacles allies are bound to face and strategies to overcome burnout would build and grow allyship for BIPOCs. Like other struggles, if the obstacles are known, and allies can prepare for them, there may be times that allies will be more willing to engage. To grow true allyship that will not cause burn out, it would be good for allies to know what may happen when they step into this role and strategies to use to avoid burnout.

To accomplish this, I focused on three main research questions. First, what characteristics make an ally? Second, would it be easier for allies to stand up if they knew the possibilities that lie ahead? Lastly, would allies be more willing to stand up if they knew the obstacles and strategies to overcome them? Before finding the answers to these questions, I first determined who the allies were for BIPOCs. To do this, I utilized snowball sampling and a survey. Following that, I used a divergent survey to dig into more detailed questions about the experiences of people identified as White allies and my school population that was not identified as White allies.

#### Participants

This study had three groups of people: BIPOCs, colleagues from my school population, and identified White allies. Within these three groups, participants included three BIPOCs, four identified White allies and seven colleagues from my school population. See Table 1 for a summary of the participants.

**Table 1**

#### *Participants*

Group Name	Selection	Description	Data Instrument

Group 1	Convenience sampling	BIPOC individuals	Survey
Group 2	Convenience sampling	School staff who were not named by Group 1 as allies	Divergent Survey
Group 3	Snowball sampling	School staff who were named by Group 1 as allies	Divergent survey; possible follow-up interview

The first group of participants (Group 1) was selected by using convenience sampling. This group was BIPOC people from my school district with whom I have already established trust. The purpose of using this group of people that trust has already been established is because I asked them to complete a survey (see Appendix A) where they were asked to identify characteristics that they felt make a good ally as well as asked them to identify people that they consider to be White allies.

The second group of participants (Group 2) was people within my school building that were not identified as White allies. As a result of the fact that these participants are people that I work with, I used convenience sampling to select these people. These participants were asked to complete a divergent survey (see Appendix B) that allowed me to dig into their beliefs. Depending on how they answered, they were taken to specific parts of the survey. Some sections ended the survey early; however, other sections asked them more questions about their beliefs and experiences.

The final group of participants was the White allies identified from the BIPOC survey (Group 3). To get this group of participants, I used snowball sampling because they were people that other participants within this study recommended. The Group 3 White ally group also answered the divergent survey that the people in my building answered (see Appendix B). In addition to the surveys, I intended to select two or three participants to conduct interviews (see Appendix C). However, only one White ally agreed to the interview. During these interviews, I clarified answers and asked relevant follow-up questions based on their answers.

### **Data Collection**

The instruments that were used for this research were surveys and interviews. I first created a survey for Group 1 - BIPOC people. This survey consisted of three questions (see Appendix A). These questions focused on determining the ethnicity of the participant, characteristics of White allies, and asking BIPOCs to name two or three people they would consider White allies. The purpose of these questions were twofold: to honor the fact that allies should not be self-identified and should instead be identified by a person of a marginalized group, and to understand what BIPOCs consider to be characteristics of White allies.

I then created a divergent survey (see Appendix A) that was given to two different groups of people - Groups 2 and 3. This survey was given to my school population (Group 2) as well as to people identified as White allies (Group 3). The surveys were identical in terms of questions and length, but there were two separate copies for me to keep the White allies separate from the school population. In this survey, the first question asked what political party the participant voted for in the 2020 Presidential Election. Given the 2020 Presidential Election and the race relations that centered around it, there seemed to be a clear divide in beliefs when it came to race relations in our country. As a result of this, I used this initial question to divert participants to

compare responses based on their 2020 Presidential Election vote. The purpose of this divergent survey was not only to hear from the participants who had been identified as White allies but to also hear from people who were not identified. I hoped that this would give me an antagonist and protagonist point of view on issues of race relations and allyship. I used both points of view to discuss obstacles White allies encounter and strategies to avoid burnout.

### **Data Analysis**

Following the surveys, I read them and looked for common themes among the participant's answers. In the survey I asked Group 1 - BIPOCs to fill out, I looked for themes around what characteristics they felt made a good White ally. In the divergent survey completed by the school population group (Group 2) and White ally group (Group 3), I first sorted them by their vote in the 2020 Presidential Election to be able to compare answers. I looked for commonalities around the following topics that fed into my overall research questions: (a) the participants' views on race relations in our country, (b) the characteristics they feel White allies should possess, (c) any experiences of byproducts of racist structures or attitudes as a result of their allyship work, (d) any symptoms of burnout they experience, (e) how they overcame the burnout if they experienced it, and (f) if they did not overcome the burnout, would knowing the obstacles they were going to encounter have helped them overcome it and why.

After compiling this information and looking for common themes, I identified two people from the White ally divergent survey (Group 3) to interview further. However, only one agreed to the interview. At the end of all of the surveys, participants were invited to send me an email (separate from the survey) so I could contact them for a possible interview and to be entered into a drawing for \$50 in instructional materials. I then followed up with interviews with the participant that was willing to give me their time. This helped me dig a little further into their

answers and to ask follow-up questions. The questions (see Appendix C) focused on things like asking why they consider themselves to be an ally, what kinds of byproducts of racist structures and attitudes they have experienced, how it made them feel, how they responded and what kind of support they had to get through any of these experiences as well as any burnout they have experienced. I hoped that this interview would give me further information about what White allies could encounter and some first-hand experiences on how to overcome the obstacles.

I believe this research is important because it will be the beginning of research done in this area and will likely need to be studied further. Allyship is something that is needed in our society in a big way right now. BIPOCs need to have White people standing beside and behind them in support of equity and racial justice. They need people of all races to speak up when injustice is happening, and White allies need to be willing to step into the role so that we can start to see change.

## Chapter 4: Findings

### BIPOC Findings

The purpose of surveying the BIPOC population was to gain some insight into what characteristics they feel make a good White ally and to also honor the fact that allies should not name themselves. This survey was completed by three members of the BIPOC population.

In this survey, I asked this population of people what characteristics White allies show in their ally work. One participant stated that allies show cooperation with all parties involved. Another participant stated that allies are aware and empathetic but not sympathetic. They use their privilege to speak up and help. Allies know when to use their privilege to help in situations and are willing to do so even when it puts their own privilege at risk. Another participant identified characteristics of people who ask questions, seek to learn, and are willing to grow.

### White Ally Findings

After hearing from the BIPOC population (Group 1), I reached out to the White allies who were named by them in their survey. Of the six identified White allies, four participants completed the survey. The purpose behind having identified White allies was to honor the fact that allies should not name themselves and should be identified by someone from a marginalized group of people. When looking through the data from surveys done by the White allies, I was looking for themes around (a) the participants' views on race relations in our country, (b) the characteristics they feel White allies should possess, (c) any experiences of byproducts of racist structures or attitudes as a result of their allyship work, (d) any symptoms of burnout they experience, (e) how they overcame the burnout if they experienced it, and (f) if they did not overcome the burnout, would knowing the obstacles they were going to encounter have helped them overcome it and why.



### ***Race Relations***

When looking at the responses of the White allies regarding race relations in our country, the consensus was that relations are not good. Some of the common themes that were present in many of the responses were that the political climate, starting with the Trump Presidency and going into the White Nationalist Ideologies, has not helped race relations. One participant said that race relations are:

Tense, there is so much going on in the world that is increasing everyone's stress and I believe that is contributing to the tensions. Particularly with the political climate that is already so divisive and entire political parties that promote racist ideology.

Another theme that emerged was that the White allies felt there had been gains during things like the Civil Rights Movement, but that the last few years have shed light on the fact that "we are not as equal as we thought we were." Overall, the White ally group felt that race relations in the United States are tense, increasing everyone's stress, unhealthy, and has caused a huge loss of trust and "our country/world has a long way to go in terms of getting people treated the same way."

### ***Characteristics***

The next thing I looked for was themes around the characteristics of White allies. When looking for themes among their answers, the first theme that stood out was that the White allies acknowledged that they had privilege and have tried to "look at my own perspective as only my own and understand that it is a privileged one..." They also said, "the more that I can learn from and use my privilege to amplify historically marginalized perspectives, both my life and my community will be better." This is an example of Feagin's notion of a White racial frame. The White ally participant is acknowledging that their perspective is a dominant one and is not

superior. Another theme was that White allies acknowledged the need to continue to learn by saying that it is important to listen and sometimes take a back seat in conversations to truly listen and understand. It was also stated “I also actively seek out information from multiple sources to challenge my own viewpoint.” The last theme I found was that the White allies felt that allies in general were people who are kind, caring, aware, and treat everyone with respect.

### ***Byproducts of Racist Structures***

After looking at the race relations and characteristics of White allies, I looked at the response around the experiences of byproducts of racist structures that the White allies felt they have encountered as a result of their allyship work. This was a question that not all the White allies felt they had experienced. One ally felt they had experienced byproducts of racist structures when thinking about their childhood friends. This ally stated that they saw their friends not get the same experiences they did and even had a “friend not want to date him [Iranian friend] because of what her family might think.” Another ally stated that she has experienced byproducts of racist structures within their church. This ally stated that they left their church because the church started to align with White Nationalist ideologies and she did not have the same beliefs.

### ***Burnout***

The last things I looked for were themes around burnout. I investigated what symptoms of burnout the White allies had experienced and how they overcame it. If they did not overcome the burnout, did they think knowing the obstacles they may have encounter would have helped? Some examples of the burnout the White ally group experienced are: “I feel like I am too small and cannot actually have a significant impact,” and another ally stated they have felt “anxiety and some depression related to feeling the need to leave my church as it flirted with White

Nationalist ideologies.” They felt they overcame the burnout through a realization that “no one person can fix a systematic issue, but I can make small impacts for people directly around me” and leaning into their faith. When asked if they thought they would have overcome the burnout if they knew the obstacles they were going to face, the White ally group said that the burnout comes in waves and knowing would not have prevented the burnout but “I prefer to understand what I am in for because it gives me an opportunity make a plan to address it.”

### **School Population Findings**

The next group of people that I surveyed were the people that were a part of my school population in which seven people from this population completed the survey. The survey was sent to people in my school population that identify as White. These were people that were not specifically identified as White allies by someone that took the BIPOCs survey, but all of these people identified themselves as an ally. I again looked for themes around the same six topics.

### ***Race Relations***

First, I looked at the school population’s view on race relations. Some commonalities I found within this section were that about half of the participants thought that race relations in the United States were mixed. They agreed that something needs to change but felt race relations were better than they were before. One participant stated, “Does something need to be done about racism...oh definitely. However, I don’t think it is near as bad as when I was growing up.” At the same time, the other half felt that the United States has a long way to go in terms of race relations. One participant said, “Overt racism is dying down, microaggressions are being called out more (although still happening, but awareness of them is being spread). I think race relations are getting better in some ways and getting worse in other ways.”

### ***Characteristics***

The next topic I looked at was the characteristics that the school population felt White allies held. Some of the themes within this section included that a White ally is open-minded, expressive, empathetic, willing to listen, and willing to speak up for marginalized populations. One participant said, “I am a person of privilege who tries to use my influence to magnify the voices of underrepresented or marginalized groups.” Another theme I identified within this topic was that the school population felt that a characteristic of a White ally is someone that is reflective. This reflective nature is used when thinking about biases, how to remove barriers for marginalized people, and how to be a better ally. The last commonality I found when looking into characteristics of White allies from the viewpoint of the school population was that an ally shares their knowledge. They are willing to do this in a variety of ways, including how one participant stated they are “able to present the knowledge I’ve gained in a broken down and meaningful way so that other White people can begin to understand the struggle of being a BIPOC.”

### ***Byproducts of Racist Structures***

After looking at the characteristics of White allies from the school population participants I looked at their experiences of byproducts of racist structures as a result of their ally work. When analyzing the responses to this question, two out of seven (29%) of the participants had stated they had experienced some sort of byproducts and two out of seven (29%) stated they were unsure. One common theme in this topic was the education system, including the curriculum. One participant stated, “Information embedded in the educational curriculum. It is not accurate or is culturally one sided.” Another way that was identified: “there is also a lack of diversity in my field as well as other areas of my life due to racist structures that help determine career paths and financial advantages, such as access to mortgage loans.” Another theme that I

identified was that of backlash because of “being a vocal advocate and pushing back on centering conversations about race around the feelings of White participants.”

Lastly, when looking at burnout from the view of the school population participants, less than half had stated they had experienced some form of burnout in their ally work. Of these participants that had experienced burnout, they stated that their symptoms included Having to compensate for the curriculum by finding my own resources has led to burnout, as well as feeling defeated when going up against structures/systems that are bigger than me. It is hard to work inside these systems when they clash with my personal Beliefs. When asked how they have overcome their burnout, they said “enlisting the help of others, if possible. Venting my concerns to trusted people. Praying about things.” When asked if knowing the obstacles they may encounter would have helped overcome the burnout, one participant said “I would overcome any feelings of burnout because this work needs to be done. It is not an option to not overcome burnout.”

### **Political Party Findings**

One of the survey questions for the school population and White ally group asked what political party the participants voted for in the 2020 Presidential Election. This question was utilized in the survey to dig into the similarities and differences around the six topics by political party. As a result, for this part of the data analysis, the White ally and school population responses were sorted by political party and then combined.

I first looked at the responses around race relations. This was one area in which Democrats and Republican participants were similar. Both parties stated that as a country, “we need to do better.” They also both stated that to some extent the United States is headed in the right direction and has had positive gains but there is more work to be done. One participant

stated that “I’ve noticed more people starting to listen and engage in conversations. I think there is a long long way to go still.”

Another area that Democrat and Republican participants had similarities was the characteristics of a White ally. Some characteristics that both parties identified are that White allies are aware, treat everyone with respect and kindness, and use their privilege to speak up and speak out for BIPOC populations. Democrats also stated that White allies are reflective, empathetic, open-minded, and willing to listen.

One topic where Democrat and Republican participants differed greatly was the experiences of byproducts of racist structures as a result of their ally work. Four out of nine (44%) Democrats stated that they had experienced byproducts of racist structures and stated things like lack of culturally responsive curriculum, lack of diversity among professional educators, and receiving backlash when they pushed back on conversations about race centering around White participant feelings. On the other hand, all, two out of two (100%) of Republican participants that took the survey were unsure if they had experienced byproducts of racist structures.

Democrats experienced burnout as a result of byproducts of racist structures. They stated that much of their burnout came from compensating for the lacking curriculum, being a part of a system that does not align with their personal beliefs and feeling defeated when going up against the systems of structures that are bigger than them.

### **White Ally Interview**

Within the survey of White allies, I asked participants that were comfortable with a follow-up interview to email me. One participant emailed and participated in a follow-up interview to dig deeper into their thoughts and experiences. This interview consisted of questions

that were similar in nature to the survey but gave the participant an opportunity to expand on their answers.

The first question I asked the participant is what makes them consider themselves an ally (see Appendix A). The participant said that it was not something they set out to do but something that just happened because they felt like being kind and aware was important.

In the next section, the participant and I discussed the byproducts of racist structures and attitudes that they had experienced. This person stated that they absolutely had experienced these, especially recently. They said that they have experienced these racist structures and attitudes in the church they were a part of prior to feeling the need to leave. The interviewee stated that in the beginning there was no overt racism, just things to remember when considering people to spend time with. Eventually, “it became very overt, and our family decided that we couldn’t associate with people who believed in these things.” Through our conversation, I asked if the participant could give me some examples of what they experienced. Examples included how the fact that the people at church would say “they” when referring to African Americans. The participant said some of the church members would say things like “they accept help from the government,” “they’re taking our resources,” there was one situation in winter one year where some kids from the congregation built a “snow wall” to simulate building a border wall. Finally, there was a situation where the pastor of the church stopped by the participant's house because they had not been in person due to COVID. This was during the 2020 Presidential Election and a lot of people had signs in their front yard to show support for their candidate of choice. The participant stated that when the pastor left their house he was clearly taking a video of the participant's front yard to video the signs because they did not align with the views of the church.

All of these experiences made the participant feel very uncomfortable. Their family eventually decided to leave the church and not associate with the members that made them feel this way. Following the conversation about how the participant felt about these experiences, I asked how the participant responded. The interviewee stated that sometimes they addressed them but sometimes “I was in shock and went home and talked to [my spouse] about it.” The participant said that the biggest support they had during this time was their family. The participant expressed how lucky they were to have an immediate family that shares the same beliefs and shows a high level of support.



## Chapter 5: Discussion

Given the very limited research on the impacts of institutional racism on White allies, there was a great need for this study. The purpose of this study was to investigate if knowing obstacles allies are bound to face and strategies to overcome burnout would build and grow allyship for BIPOCs. As I dug into the data analysis, I found areas where my research is supported by prior research as well as areas that conflicted, in addition to insights on the three main research questions of this study:

- What characteristics make an ally?
- Would it be easier for allies to stand up if they knew the possibilities that lie ahead?
- Would allies be more willing to stand up if they knew the obstacles and strategies to overcome them?

This goes to show there is more work that needs to be done on this topic and it should not stop with this study.

One of the first areas I found that my study supported prior research was from the characteristics of White allies in my BIPOC survey. Previous research has shown that the way BIPOCs describes White allies is someone who is willing to give up their social privileges to fight for justice. This aligns with a response from one of my participants from the BIPOC survey. This participant stated that they felt White allies “use their privilege to speak up and help. Allies know when to use their privilege to help in situations and are willing to do so even when it puts their own privilege at risk.” Singh’s (2019) work in *The Racial Healing Handbook* was also reflected in my BIPOC survey in terms of what a White ally should and should not do. Singh states that an ally educates themselves about racism and continues to grow. This was another

characteristic that was identified in my BIPOC survey. One participant stated that characteristics of White allies are those that “ask questions and seek to learn and grow.”

In addition to the ways my study was supported by prior research for the BIPOC survey, there was also a lot of support when it came to both of my divergent surveys. Both the identified White allies and the school population survey had a lot of links to previous research. One link is how racism is identified and experiences that one of my White ally participants had. Brooks and Watson (2019) explored different levels of racism. Within these levels of racism, there were links to experiences for one of my White ally participants in two types identified by Brooks and Watson: individual racism and dyadic racism. This White ally experienced many byproducts of racist structures in their church. They experienced individual racism when describing an event that happened with children in her church. In order to look at individual racism, you have to look at how people live and the racist behaviors they have adopted due to their racist environment. The White ally participant experienced individual racism because some children in their congregation built a “snow wall” one year to replicate the wall that was discussed to be built at the border during the Trump administration. This is an example of individual racism because the children were picking up on racist attitudes because of the environment they lived in.

Another one of Brooks and Watsons (2019) levels of racism existed in dyadic racism. This is racism that occurs within the relationship of two people within a racist structure. This can be perpetuated or eradicated through leadership. The White ally had an example of this because they were describing how many of the members of their church had racist ideologies. It was then taken to another level when their pastor stopped by their house and videotaped their yard because they had signs to support the Democratic Presidential candidate. This was an indication of dyadic racism and how leadership can perpetuate racism because of how the pastor was infusing

political beliefs within their church either overtly or subtly. As a result of this overt display of video taping, there is either an overt or subtle implication that the Democratic party is wrong. This, in turn, is reflected in the church because of the level of power and leadership the pastor holds.

When looking at the ways allies overcome burnout, there was a supporting link with research done by Case (2012). In this study, she observed a group of White women who gathered to discuss the impact of racism and to reflect on their experiences. There was support for this type of work in my divergent survey in the school population because one participant stated that when they have feelings of burnout they “enlisted the help of others.” Case found that when Whites can gather to discuss race it is beneficial and can help energize their work. Another way that Case’s research was supported was with another participant in the school population survey. Case’s research showed that one way White people can utilize their privilege is by challenging racism to get other Whites to listen. This was shown in my school population survey by one participant saying that one characteristic they have when supporting BIPOCs is by being able to be “confident in the knowledge that I’ve gained thus far and can present that knowledge in a broken down and meaningful way so that other White people can begin to understand the struggle on being a BIPOC.”

Another way that my study was supported by previous research is in the area of burnout around Singh’s (2019) work when she discusses that allies do not get to pause their work. She states that healthy allies recognize when they are overcommitting and do not overextend themselves, but also do not stand in silence when they see racial oppression. This was supported in my divergent survey of the school population when one participant stated “I would overcome

any feelings of burnout because this work needs to be done. It is not an option to not overcome burnout.”

When looking at symptoms that lead to burnout, my divergent survey aligned with work done by Gorski (2019). Gorski looked at how racial justice activists experienced burnout and that their burnout was centered around four themes. One theme that showed up in my divergent survey of White allies was the theme of emotional disposition. This is when allies struggle with the huge personal responsibility to eliminate racism and they feel overwhelmed and have a deep emotional relationship to racial justice. This showed up in an answer given by a White ally in my divergent survey where this participant described the symptoms of burnout they had felt by saying “I feel like I am too small and cannot actually have a significant impact.” Another theme from Gorski’s study that showed up in my study was the theme of backlash. This theme showed up in my divergent survey of my school population when a participant stated they had had byproducts of racist structures and attitudes because they had “received backlash from being a vocal advocate and pushing back on centering conversations about race around the feelings of white participants.” This participant’s experience of backlash aligns with Gorski’s theme in terms of backlash in a professional vulnerability aspect. The last theme from Gorski’s study that aligned with my research was structural causes that showed up in both the White ally and school population divergent surveys. Gorski says these causes are when people experience the impossible task of creating change against White supremacy that exists in institutional structures that are bigger than them. This is supported in both surveys when participants of the White ally group stated that they felt “too small,” and did not feel they could make a “significant impact.” It also showed up in the divergent survey of the school population when a participant who identified as a White ally stated they felt “defeated when going up against structures/systems that

are bigger than me. It is hard to work inside these systems when they clash with my personal beliefs.”

The goal of an ally is to become a good ally. Selvanthan et al. (2018) discussed one way of becoming a good ally is to have positive contact with Black Americans. This research was supported in my divergent survey with the school population when a participant described why they became an ally. This participant stated that they “always grew up around BIPOC” and “I have always been accepted as a part of the Black community in my hometown. I like to think I have always been an ally.” This response supports Selvanthan et al. (2018) because this participant has had a lifetime of positive contact with Black Americans and it, in turn, impacted their work as an ally.

In many ways my research is supported by previous research. However, I would be wrong to gloss over a big conflict that existed in my research. Allies should be identified by someone from a marginalized population naming them. This is shown in a variety of research that already exists. Singh’s (2019) work addresses this in *The Racial Healing Handbook* where she discusses that the first thing to remember is that allies cannot name themselves. My research did not fully align with this because the divergent survey given to the school population had participants that identified themselves as White allies without being named in my BIPOC survey. Although this is a conflict from previous research to my own research, it is important to realize that just because the self-identified White allies were not named in the BIPOC survey I conducted, it does not mean another BIPOC individual in my school or the community would not have named them had they completed the survey. There was a small sample size of BIPOC individuals in this study, and that may have affected which White allies were and were not named. As a result of the participants from the school population not being identified from my

BIPOC survey as a White ally, it seems they were self-identifying, in which previous research states should not be done.

Another way my research did not align with previous research was in reference to the White racial frame. It was difficult to find responses from participants in my study that aligned with the White racial frame, because the participants I had were invested in this topic and could have likely done work prior to this study to start to overcome the White racial frame. This could have been caused by response bias, where participants who are aware of and interested in a topic are more likely to participate in the research. Potential participants who are not invested in work around allyship, that may have more of the White racial frame mindset did not answer my survey. Critical whiteness studies and the White racial frame are imperative to my research because education in the United States is almost 90% White, middle-class and female. Given this, “it is imperative that we investigate how the overwhelming presence of whiteness continues to manifest itself” (Matias & Mackey, 2015, p. 34).

When looking back at the research questions of this study, there were examples of my research answering all three questions. The first research question was around characteristics of White allies. This question was answered by BIPOCs, identified White allies, and my school population. The responses from these groups of people addressed this question and they also aligned with previous research. For example, survey responses included staying humble, listening to BIPOCs experiences and gaining knowledge and education. The second research question was is it would be easier for White allies to stand up if they knew the obstacles that they could face. This question was answered more directly by the White ally group than the school population group. One of the White ally participants stated that they would like to know how to make a plan but they did not feel it would have eliminated the burnout they had experienced. The

last research question this study asked was if White allies would be more willing to stand up if they had strategies to overcome the obstacles they may face. This question was answered by the White ally participant that I previously stated as well as a school population participant that said the work was too important to not overcome burnout and obstacles.

### **Limitations**

Several limitations existed in the present study. First, when this study was submitted for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, it was not initially granted. The person reviewing this study had concerns and felt that it needed a full review by the IRB. Although I had permission from my principal, the reviewer cited that there were concerns that it would be difficult to obtain approval to do this type of study in the school district where I worked. In addition, the reviewer felt that the methodology was “divisive” in nature and questioned my knowledge, prior research, and sensitivity to the topic. As a result of this initial review, the study had to be withdrawn from the initial IRB process, modified, and then resubmitted for exempt review.

The next limitation that existed for this study was the recruitment of survey participants. This limitation existed because there were a small number of participants who filled out the surveys to give their feedback on both the BIPOC survey as well as the divergent survey (see Appendix B) that was sent to identified White allies. Within this limitation, there was another limitation that existed in terms of the initial emails with the surveys and informed consent going to some of the potential participants’ spam folders.

Another limitation that existed with this study was the fact that a few months prior to the surveys going out, I took an administration role. This created a wondering if it would impact the number of responses that would be given because of the shift in power dynamics from colleague

to administrator. In addition to this, there was also a pending teacher strike that limited the amount of time I had to collect data through the surveys.

The last limitation that existed within this study was my question on if the participants truly understood the terminology in one of the questions on the survey. As I started looking at the results of the survey, I wondered if the participants understood what experiencing byproducts of racist structures meant.

This is a topic that has limited research and needs to be studied further. The IRB response from the initial submission indicates that this topic is sensitive in nature but is important work. In order to combat racist structures that exist in institutions, White allies need to be able to stand with the BIPOC population with confidence and there needs to be more who are willing to stand and not be silent.



## Chapter 6: Conclusion

There has been very limited research on the impacts of institutional racism on White allies and there is a big need for a study like this one. There is a need for not only more White allies but also stronger ones that will not be afraid to stand beside BIPOC populations. However, too many times allies remain silent for a variety of reasons ranging from lack of knowledge to backlash. A study like this one is important because the hope is that it will inform White allies of the obstacles and burnout they may face and how to overcome them. In turn, there is a hope that this will grow allyship in numbers and strength because it will give White allies an opportunity to be prepared for their work as an ally.

This study gave insight into what BIPOCs consider to be good characteristics of an ally and then allowed me to reach out to named White allies. I was also able to explore what White allies and colleagues from my school population consider to be characteristics of a good ally, their view on race relations right now in the United States, any byproducts of racism as a result of their allyship work, if they had experienced burnout and how they overcame it, and if they knew obstacles ahead of time if they would have gotten to the burnout phase. Through surveys and an interview, I was able to get some answers to all of these questions.

Many of the findings from my study were reflected in previous research. I found similar answers on what makes a good White ally in my study that I found in research I've done on the topic. I also found that some of the types of burnout that had previously been studied existed for some of the participants of my study. Finally, I found that the ways some of the participants in my study overcame burnout were similar to ways that were found in previous work on activist burnout.

This study is the tip of the iceberg when it comes to growing allyship in numbers and strength. In order to continue to do this, allies may need to understand the obstacles they may encounter. One way to learn about the obstacles, burnout, and ways to overcome the burnout is to talk to current White allies to gain perspective. Findings from this study cannot be the endpoint. First, more research needs to be done around this topic. Then systems need to be implemented based on further research so White allies can grow and gain in strength. Without more research and implemented systems, it is hard to move forward and give the support that BIPOCs deserves and needs.

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## Appendix A

BIPOC Survey

4/24/22, 12:44 PM

## BIPOC Survey

Thank you for participating in my research for my Graduate Thesis. I appreciate the time and effort you are putting into this survey. Please answer the following questions as honestly as you can.

I will be doing a drawing for two winners for \$50 worth of teachers' choice of instructional materials for participants who feel comfortable emailing me after completion of the survey at [kjmaclin@eiu.edu](mailto:kjmaclin@eiu.edu).

Also, if you are willing to be available for a follow up interview please email me at [kjmaclin@eiu.edu](mailto:kjmaclin@eiu.edu).

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\* Required

1. What is your ethnic background? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- White/Caucasian
- Asian-Eastern
- Asian-Indian
- Hispanic
- African American
- Native American
- Mixed Race
- Other

## Appendix B

## Divergent Survey Form 1

Thank you for participating in my research for my Graduate Thesis. I appreciate the time and effort you are putting into this survey. Please answer the following questions as honestly as you can.

I will be doing a drawing for two winners for \$50 worth of teachers' choice of instructional materials for participants who feel comfortable emailing me after completion of the survey at [kjmaclin@eiu.edu](mailto:kjmaclin@eiu.edu).

Also, if you are willing to be available for a follow up interview please email me at [kjmaclin@eiu.edu](mailto:kjmaclin@eiu.edu).

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\* Required

1. What is your ethnic background? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- White/Caucasian
- Asian-Eastern
- Asian-Indian
- Hispanic
- African American
- Native-American
- Mixed Race
- Other

2. Who did you vote for in the 2020 Presidential Election? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Democrat    *Skip to question 3*
- Republican    *Skip to question 14*
- Independent    *Skip to question 25*
- I did not vote    *Skip to question 25*

#### Democrat Voters

3. Do you consider yourself an ally for people of color? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Yes    *Skip to question 4*
- No    *Skip to section 3 (Democrat-Allyship No/Unsure)*
- Unsure    *Skip to section 3 (Democrat-Allyship No/Unsure)*

#### Democrat-Allyship No/Unsure

#### Democrat-Allyship

4. Why did you become an ally? \*

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5. What are your views on current race relations? \*

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6. What characteristics do you have that you feel support your role as an ally for people of color

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7. Have you experienced byproducts of racist structures and attitudes as a result of your work as an ally? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes    *Skip to question 8*
- No    *Skip to section 9 (Democrat byproducts-No/Unsure)*
- Unsure    *Skip to section 9 (Democrat byproducts-No/Unsure)*

Democrat Byproducts-Yes



8. Please describe the byproducts of racist structures and attitudes you have experienced. \*

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9. Have you experienced burnout as a result of your allyship work? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes    *Skip to question 10*

No

Democrat Burnout-Yes

10. What symptoms lead you to feeling burnt out? \*

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11. Did you overcome the burnout and return to your allyship work? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes    *Skip to question 12*

No    *Skip to question 13*

Democrat Overcoming Burnout-Yes

12. What strategies did you use to help overcome the burnout? \*

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Democrat Overcoming Burnout-No

13. If you knew what obstacles may be present prior to beginning your ally work, do you think you would have been able to overcome the burnout? Why or why not? \*

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Democrat byproducts-No/Unsure

Republican Voters

14. Do you consider yourself an ally for people of color? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Yes Skip to question 15
- No Skip to section 18 (Republican-Allyship No/Unsure)
- Unsure Skip to section 18 (Republican-Allyship No/Unsure)

Republican-Allyship

15. Why did you become an ally? \*

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16. What are your views on current race relations? \*

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18. What symptoms lead you to feeling burnt out? \*

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19. Did you overcome the burnout and return to your allyship work? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes *Skip to question 21*

No *Skip to question 20*

Trump Overcoming Burnout No

20. If you knew what obstacles may be present prior to your work as an ally, do you think you would have been able to overcome the burnout? Why or why not? \*

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Trump Overcoming Burnout-Yes

17. What characteristics do you have that you feel support your role as an ally for people of color? \*

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18. Have you experienced byproducts of racist structures and attitudes as a result of your work as an ally? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Yes Skip to question 19
- No Skip to section 17 (Republican Byproducts- No/Unsure)
- Unsure Skip to section 17 (Republican Byproducts- No/Unsure)

Republican byproducts-Yes

19. Please describe the byproducts of racist structures and attitudes you have experienced. \*

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23. What are your views on current race relations? \*

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24. What characteristics do you have that you feel support your role as an ally for people of color? \*

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25. Have you experienced byproducts of racist structures and attitudes as a result of your work as an ally? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes    *Skip to question 26*
- No    *Skip to section 27 (DNV-Byproducts No/Unsure)*
- Unsure    *Skip to section 27 (DNV-Byproducts No/Unsure)*

DNV-Allyship No/Unsure

DNV-Byproducts Yes

20. Have you experienced burnout as a result of your allyship work? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes    *Skip to question 21*
- No    *Skip to section 16 (Republican Burnout-No)*

#### Republican Burnout-Yes

21. What symptoms lead you to feeling burnt out? \*

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22. Did you overcome the burnout and return to your allyship work? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes    *Skip to question 24*
- No    *Skip to question 23*

#### Republican Overcoming Burnout No

29. Did you overcome the burnout and return to your allyship work? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Yes    *Skip to question 30*

No    *Skip to question 31*

#### DNV Overcoming Burnout Yes

30. What strategies did you use to help overcome the burnout? \*

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#### DNV Overcoming Burnout No

31. If you knew what obstacles may be present prior to your work as an ally, do you think you would have been able to overcome the burnout? Why or why not? \*

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#### DNV-Byproducts No/Unsure

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23. If you knew what obstacles may be present prior to your work as an ally, do you think you would have been able to overcome the burnout? Why or why not? \*

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Republican Overcoming Burnout-Yes

24. What strategies did you use to help overcome the burnout? \*

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Republican Burnout-No

Republican Byproducts- No/Unsure

Republican-Allyship No/Unsure

Did Not Vote

25. Do you consider yourself an ally for people of color? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Yes Skip to question 26
- No Skip to section 21 (DNV-Allyship No/Unsure)
- Unsure Skip to section 21 (DNV-Allyship No/Unsure)

DNV-Allyship

26. Why did you become an ally? \*

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27. What are your views on current race relations? \*

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28. What characteristics do you have that you feel support your role as an ally for people of color? \*

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29. Have you experienced byproducts of racist structures and attitudes as a result of your work as an ally? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Yes Skip to question 30
- No Skip to section 27 (DNV-Byproducts No/Unsure)
- Unsure Skip to section 27 (DNV-Byproducts No/Unsure)

DNV-Allyship No/Unsure

DNV-Byproducts Yes

30. Please describe the byproducts of racist structures and attitudes you have experienced. \*

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31. Have you experienced burnout as a result of your allyship work? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes Skip to question 32
- No Skip to section 23 (DNV Burnout No)

DNV Burnout No

DNV Burnout Yes

32. What symptoms lead you to feeling burnt out? \*

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33. Did you overcome the burnout and return to your allyship work? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes Skip to question 34
- No Skip to question 35

DNV Overcoming Burnout Yes

34. What strategies did you use to help overcome the burnout? \*

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DNV Overcoming Burnout No

35. If you knew what obstacles may be present prior to your work as an ally, do you think you would have been able to overcome the burnout? Why or why not? \*

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DNV-Byproducts No/Unsure

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## Appendix C

**If the person answered YES to considering themselves an ally.**

1. What makes you consider yourself an ally?

**If the person answered NO to considering themselves an ally AND they were identified by a person of color.**

1. A person of color identified you as an ally. Why do you think they would have identified you? What work have you done to support BIPOCs? Tell me about your experiences with BIPOCs.

**If the person answered YES to experiencing byproducts of racial structures and attitudes.**

1. What examples do you have where you experienced byproducts of racist structures and attitudes? (R.Q. 1)
  
2. How did it make you feel? (R.Q. 2)

3. How did you respond to these experiences?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What, if any, supports did you have during these experiences?

**If the person answered YES to experiencing burnout.**

1. Did anyone help you through this time in your ally work? If so, who and how?