

## DEFINITIONS

**CULTURAL RACISM:** Those aspects of society that overtly and covertly attribute value and normality to white people and Whiteness, devalue, stereotype, and label people of color as “other” different, less than or render them invisible.

**HETEROSEXUAL PRIVILEGE:** The benefits and advantages heterosexuals receive in a heterosexist culture, including, but not limited to, marriage, job security, tax breaks, parental rights, visitation rights and inheritance rights.

**INSTITUTIONAL RACISM:** The network of institutional structures, policies, and practices that create advantages and benefits for white people, and discrimination, oppression, and disadvantage for people from marginalized racial groups.

**PREJUDICE:** A set of negative personal beliefs about a social group that leads individuals to prejudge people from that group, or the group in general, regardless of individual differences among members of that target group.

**OPPRESSION:** A systemic social phenomenon based on the perceived and real difference among social groups that involve ideological domination, institutional control, and the promulgation of the oppressor’s ideology, logic system, and culture to the oppressed group. The result is the exploitation of one social group by another for the benefit of the oppressor group.

**RACISM:** The systemic subordination of members of marginalized racial groups who have relatively little social power by members of a dominant racial group. This subordination is supported by the actions of individuals, cultural norms and values, and institutional structures and practices of society.

**WHITE PRIVILEGE:** The concrete benefits of access to resources and social rewards, and the power to shape the norms and values of society which white people receive, unconsciously or consciously, by virtue of their skin color, in a racist society.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Definitions adapted from *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*. Ed. Adams, Bell & Griffin.

<sup>5</sup> “Qualities of an Ally” adapted from Western Michigan “Safe on Campus” Program by Gregory M. Weight; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Transgender Community Office, University of Delaware, March 2000; and Southwest Institute for Cross-Cultural Relationships.

## QUALITIES OF AN ALLY

1. Recognizes one’s own privilege as a member of the agents group.
2. Has worked to develop an understanding of a target group and the needs of this group.
3. Chooses to align with the target group and respond to their needs.
4. Believes that it is in one’s self-interest to be an ally.
5. Is committed to personal growth (in spite of the possible discomfort or pain) required to promote social change.
6. Expects support from other allies.
7. Is able to acknowledge and articulate, without guilt or apology, how oppressive patterns operate.
8. Expects to make mistakes, but does not use it as an excuse for inaction.
9. Knows that one has a clear responsibility to fight oppression whether or not persons in the target group chose to respond.
10. Assumes that people in a targeted group are already communicating in the best and most comfortable way.
11. Does not expect members of the targeted group to educate them.
12. Assumes that the target group consists of survivors (not victims) and that they have a long history of resistance.
13. Does not attempt to convince target group that one is on their side. Shows support through actions, not words.
14. Does not expect gratitude from people in the target group and remembers that being an ally is a matter of choice.
15. Creates a comfortable setting. Is conscious of concepts such as cultural imperialism and cultural appropriation.
16. Confronts oppressive jokes, slurs, and actions. Knows that silence may communicate condoning of an oppressive statement.<sup>5</sup>

## *Privilege, Allyship, & Safe Space*



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Changes on issues of justice, equity and fairness come after resistance, denial and pain have all been worked through. This work is a journey; there is no endpoint.

This pamphlet provides information to help dismantle systems of oppression and join the movement for social justice.



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## WHAT IS PRIVILEGE?

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines privilege as *a special advantage, immunity, permission, right or benefit granted to or enjoyed by an individual, class, or caste.*

In the context of relations between social groups, privilege is a consequence of social hierarchies and power dynamics. Privilege is not a right or a deserved entitlement; it is an arbitrary advantage or benefit enjoyed by an individual or a group, based upon prejudicial and/or discriminatory norms, attitudes and practices.

The “normalization of privilege” implies that members of society are judged, and succeed or fail, measured against characteristics that are held by those who are privileged. The privileged characteristic becomes the norm. Those who stand outside these norms as regarded as “alternative” or “the other.”

Thus, when examining privilege we find that it consists of the following elements:

- ♦ the characteristics of the privileged group **define the societal norm**, often benefiting those in the privileged group.
- ♦ due to conflicting privilege with the societal norms and the implicit choice to ignore oppression, privilege is **often not recognized** by the holder of privilege.
- ♦ members of privileged groups **may opt out of struggles against oppression** if they choose.

Privilege exists and operates in various forms, shaped by the societal power relations from which it results. Since we are all players in these power systems, we all enjoy some form of privilege. By being critically conscious of our privileges and responsible for how we exercise it, we can position ourselves as allies in the movements for social justice.<sup>1</sup>

## FROM PRIVILEGE TO ALLYSHIP

*An ally is a member of the “dominant” or “majority” group who questions or rejects the dominant ideology and works against oppression through support of, and as an advocate, with or for, the oppressed population.*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “What is Privilege?” Adapted from Wildman, S. M., & Davis, A. D. “Language and Silence: Making Systems of Privilege Visible.” *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice: An Anthology on Racism, Antisemitism, Sexism, Heterosexism, Ableism, and Classism*. Ed. Marianne Adams et al. New York: Routledge, 2000. 50-60.

<sup>2</sup> Definition adapted from Washington, J. & Evans, N. J. “Becoming an Ally.” *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice: An Anthology on Racism, Antisemitism, Sexism, Heterosexism, Ableism, and Classism*. Ed. Marianne Adams et al. New York: Routledge, 2000. 312-318.

Growing up in this world, we have all been subject to a process of socialization which compels us to act in role-specific ways. We have been socialized into a range of roles from domination to subordination. This affects us all in negative, painful ways. Learning to become an ally is the first-step towards interrupting this oppressive cycle of socialization. The following steps are an effective means to becoming an ally:

### Awareness

Living with awareness implies developing a critical consciousness of the world around us. It involves developing the ability to notice and pay attention to various aspects of our daily lives, including our language, our behavior, and even our thoughts. Such awareness can be gained through self-examine of one’s privilege, respectful and non-intrusive conversations with members of marginalized groups, and various forms of self-education.

### Analysis

This requires that we not only notice what is going on in the world around us, but also that we think critically about it. It means that we must develop to capacity to determine what needs to be in a given situation.

### Education

We must educate ourselves about the histories and experiences of target groups within the context of the society which we inhabit. This includes educating ourselves about the culture and norms of target groups, and learning about how laws, policies, and practices may adversely affect, or be used to the benefit of, target groups.

### Interrupting Behavior

We must develop the skills to interrupt prejudiced remarks or actions by communicating our knowledge and analyses of given issues and situations, and to initiate awareness-raising.

### Taking Action

Commitment to action comes from the recognition that only through participation in movements for social change can we achieve the goal of liberating ourselves from cycles of oppression. Taking action means deciding what needs to be done, and then making sure that the action is taken.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Above steps adapted from Washington, J. & Evans, N. J., *supra* note 2. and Love, B. J. “Developing a Liberatory Consciousness.” *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice: An Anthology on Racism, Antisemitism, Sexism, Heterosexism, Ableism, and Classism*. Ed. Marianne Adams et al. New York: Routledge, 2000. 470-474

## SAFE SPACE

*Safe spaces are spaces that are created of, by and for members of marginalized or underrepresented social groupings who share common (or similar) histories and experiences, and/or are routinely subjected to and similarly impacted by socioeconomic, cultural, political and other societal hierarchies and oppression. Safe spaces are generally identity and/or issue-experience based.*

Social groupings are a consequence of societal constructs such as race, class, gender identity and expression, sexuality, ability, etc. Marginalized or underrepresented social groups are those that are alternates to or lie outside of the established social “norm.” As a result, members of such groups are routinely subject to different forms of prejudice and oppression, such as societal, systemic, institutional, intergroup, interpersonal and personal.

- ♦ Safe spaces offer members of marginalized or underrepresented groups the **ability “to be”**, in a context outside of the established norm and away from societal prejudice and oppression.
- ♦ These spaces serve as means of **self-education**, where members may learn about those aspects of their histories and cultures that have been invisibilized by the dominant culture or mainstream society.
- ♦ They provide **personal and emotional support** by allowing members to share their stories with those who share common or similar histories and experiences.
- ♦ Safe spaces are also **spaces of resistance and empowerment**, through which members can participate in the study of and in conversations about oppression, prejudice and social justice, without fear of backlash.
- ♦ While access to safe spaces is restricted based upon identity and/or experience, these spaces are neither exclusive, exclusionary nor divisive. Conversations that occur within these spaces are instrumental in empowering underrepresented groups to develop their own voice which is crucial to **facilitating constructive dialogue between marginalized and dominant groups**.
- ♦ The existence of safe spaces within mainstream society disrupts systems of privilege whereby dominant groups enjoy unlimited access to space, community and knowledge as well as **challenges dominant groups to recognize and reflect upon their privilege**.
- ♦ In order to learn more, one should **attend open workshops, trainings and presentations** that may be organized by members of safe spaces.

## What is an Ally?

**An ally is a member of the “majority” group who works to end oppression in his or her personal life through support of and as an advocate for the oppressed population.**

*The following quotes about what it means to be an ally were taken from discussions conducted by Student Allies for Equality at Western Washington University:*

- “An ally validates and supports people who are different from themselves.”
- “An ally realizes and questions personal privilege and uses it to benefit people who are oppressed.”
- “An ally examines their own prejudices and is not afraid to look at themselves.”
- “An ally supports the oppressed group’s voice and sense of autonomy.”
- “An ally works with the oppressed group, offering support by being accountable to, but not being responsible for, the oppressed group.”
- “An ally is an advocate by challenging (mis)conceptions when the oppressed group is absent.”
- “Being an ally means: sharing the power, taking a risk, taking responsibility, opening yourself up to the unknown, realizing that you are a part of the solution, leveling the playing field, accepting differences, making allowances, and leading by action.”

## Become an Ally

*Becoming an ally is a process. Take time to think about the process outlined below and about where you are and where you would like to be.*

### Step One: Be Aware

Who are you? Understanding your viewpoint and its origins in maleness or femaleness, religion, ethnicity, race, physical and emotional abilities, class, etc., is critical to understanding your relationship to others, to ideas, and to events.

### Step Two: Educate Yourself

Learning about others is the next important step in becoming an ally. Challenge yourself to learn about persons, cultures, and groups that you do not identify with. It is only by learning about others that you can stand with and for them in the face of oppression. The knowledge you gain will enable you to be accountable to the persons for whom you are an ally.

### Step Three: Gain the Skills

In order to be an effective ally, you need to develop skills to communicate the knowledge you have gained about yourself and others. This may seem frightening at first, since it involves taking steps towards action. Research venues where you can practice the skills needed to become an ally in a safe, non-judgmental environment.

### Step Four: Take Action

It is only by participation that we become involved in the struggle to end oppression in our communities. Yes, it is challenging. Yes, it can be frightening. However, if we keep our knowledge, thoughts, skills, and awareness to ourselves, we deprive others not only of our own gifts, but of a life of richness and equality. Share your knowledge.

## **Being an Ally: Action Ideas and Tips**

1. I know when to step back. I make space for the oppressed person/people to speak out, share, lead, and validate one another.
2. I acknowledge that persons from under-represented groups need to take the lead in fighting the oppression that they face. I take direction from and defer to them about how to proceed.
3. I do not expect members of under-represented groups to explain to or educate me.
4. I do not attempt to convince individuals in a marginalized group that I'm on their side. I show support through continuous action. I approach the work I do as support work. I realize it is not my job to call the shots, but to support their struggles as an ally.
5. I remember that members of under-represented groups are survivors (not victims) and have a long history of resistance. I celebrate instances of resistance. I learn and talk about forms of resistance and instances of successful struggle, not just instances of oppression.
6. I speak up when I hear people implying that under-represented groups are powerless or deserving of pity. I remind them that being oppressed does not mean being powerless.
7. I talk to other members of my privileged group about privilege and oppression. I make these conversations part of my daily life.
8. I am able to acknowledge how oppressive patterns operate in practice.
9. I listen to a person from an under-represented group express their concerns and perspectives about community issues and encourage them to take action. I also ask what they want to do and how I can help make that happen.
10. I assume that people in under-represented groups are already communicating in the best and most comfortable way they can.
11. I make the concerns of under-represented groups visible by helping people get in the door.
12. I connect with other allies.
13. I am friends with people from groups with whom I do not personally identify.
14. I treat people as individuals. I don't make one person represent all of an under-represented group.
15. I do not expect gratitude from people in an under-represented group. I remember that being an ally is a matter of choice.
16. I create a comfortable setting. I am conscious of wardrobe, mannerisms, and things used to decorate my living and work environments.
17. I know that an under-represented group may question my motive for being an ally. I know that this doubt is valid.

# The Ally's Path

- Interrupt offensive jokes
- Learn from someone who is different from you
- Speak up for those voices not present
- Educate yourself and others
- Attend a rally
- Research the issues and candidates before you vote in an election
- Read up on social justice issues
- Read books/articles on people different than yourself
- Reflect on your own experiences and how you might be a better ally in the future
- Interact and find support from other allies
- Vote for change
- Don't assume to completely know someone else's experience
- Try to empathize not sympathize
- Don't judge others
- Keep an open mind
- Don't assume you know another's experience until you walk in their shoes, and even then, try to show empathy
- Attend a protest or march for something you believe in
- Understand your own privileges
- Acknowledge the power bestowed upon you based on your social group membership
- Don't deny your privileges
- Utilize your power to bring about social change that benefits all people, especially those underprivileged
- Vote for candidates who promote social justice issues
- Help others understand their own privileges
- Don't show pity on others
- Work together and support other allies
- Join with other agents to further understand their collective power and privilege, while working together to bring about individual and social change
- Seek to understand all the different forms of oppression
- Let your actions speak louder than your words
- Notice the numerous intersections between different forms of oppression
- Highlight the commonalities between the various targeted groups
- Believe that there are always possibilities for alliance building
- Keep the faith and hope alive
- Don't buy into stereotypes
- Respond with acts of kindness
- Don't expect external rewards for your work as an ally- feel good and be proud about the work you do
- Do it because it's the right thing to do
- Walk your talk
- Know there are different ways of doing and seeing everything
- Be comfortable with criticism and feedback
- Try to acknowledge your own prejudices and baggage
- Challenge the norm
- Use examples that don't exclude a particular group's experience
- Don't get stuck feeling guilty for the oppression of the past
- Take ownership in your own conscious and/or unconscious participation in oppression
- Accept that others may stereotype you
- Demonstrate your ally role through your actions rather than trying to convince others of it through your words
- Believe that everything is a never-ending process
- Let your voice be heard
- Never speak for an entire group's experience or try to represent an entire group
- Don't expect someone else to represent an entire social group
- Remember to speak only from your own experience
- Support people in the manner they want to be supported
- Don't assume to know what support they want and what's best for them
- Recognize that no one form of oppression is more significant than another- there is no hierarchy of oppressions
- Be inclusive
- Accept that none of us are experts in diversity
- Provide support and assistance to those in need when requested, don't assume neediness
- Know that your work is never done
- Go out on a limb
- Know that the past is not your fault, but the present and future are your responsibility