

A Guide to Allyship

A guide for individuals

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GWIMS Toolkit

Scope of toolkit

- As the key focus area for GWIMS, this toolkit focuses mostly on allyship in relation to gender equity but many of the ideas/tools described are applicable to allyship for other group identities, including race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.
- This toolkit provides foundational information on what allyship is, how to act as one, barriers to becoming an ally and more – this is not everything about allyship but provides an entry point for those new to the topic
- Allyship language and practices are constantly evolving so we present information from current understanding and practices – important to stay updated

Defining Allyship



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Before we get started.....

It's important to remember that ally is a verb, not a noun -

Allyship is an action, not an identity.



What is allyship?

“

A lifelong process of building relationships based on trust, consistency, and accountability with marginalized individuals and/or groups of people.

”

-Forbes.com

“Allies are people who recognize the unearned privilege they receive from society’s patterns of injustice and **take responsibility** for changing these patterns.”

Anne Bishop; www.becominganally.ca

ALLY

A - always center on the impacted

L - listen and learn from the oppressed

L - leverage your privilege

Y - yield the floor

@iKaylaReed on Twitter

Allies act when...

- Microaggressions are present
- Sexual and gender harassment are present
- Someone is belittled, bullied, or disrespected
- General discriminatory, racist, sexist, etc. views or comments are said – regardless if they are said directly to someone
- Any time someone with a marginalized identity needs (and wants) to be supported!

Why is allyship important?

- You are letting people know they are not alone
- You are letting others know that what's happening is not acceptable
- Individuals in oppressed groups may not have the power, status, or opportunity that you have to influence institutional and systemic change
- No one is free, free to be themselves and free to live up to their potential, when others are oppressed – we are all responsible

Traits of effective allies

- Using your privilege to take the struggle on as your own
- Learning and using inclusive language
- Practicing cultural humility
- Listen to the experts
- Know the politics of past struggles
 - People from marginalized communities know their history and where it intersects with other communities – good and effective allyship means you should know this as well
- Ask – don't make assumptions

Background



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History of allyship

- Harriet Beecher Stowe, John Brown, and Angelina Grimke were allies to the abolitionists
- Frederick Douglass, Henry Blackwell, and George Francis Train were allies to the suffrage movement
- Leslie W. Dunbar, Virginia Durr, and Anne Braden were allies to the civil rights movement
- Elizabeth Taylor, Oprah Winfrey, and President Barack Obama were/are allies to the LGBTQ communities

History

- Ally as a verb was used in the 14th century
 - to unite or form a connection or relation between
 - to form or enter an alliance
- Ally as a noun was used in 1598
- Sovereign or state associated with another by treaty or league
 - *One that is associated with another as a helper; A person or group that provides assistant and support in an ongoing effort, activity or struggle*
 - Often now used specifically of a person who is not a member of a marginalized or mistreated group but who expresses or gives support to that group
- Allyship was used in 1856
- The state or condition of being an ally

Merriam Webster.com Dictionary Merriam Webster, <https://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/allyship>

History cont.

- The concept has always been part of fight for equity but was not commonly used language
- Became more common in the 1980's with regard to multicultural education

<http://bostonreview.net/gender-sexuality/micki-mcelya-history-social-justice-ally>

- Became part of LGBT language LGBTQA
- Beyond Tolerance: Gays, Lesbians and Bisexuals on Campus had a chapter called “Becoming an Ally”, 1991

<http://bostonreview.net/gender-sexuality/micki-mcelya-history-social-justice-ally>

- Became part of gender and race movements
- Male allies
- White allies

Intersectionality



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Allyship requires intersectionality

Intersectionality: sociological theory that outlines how an individual may face multiple types of overlapping discrimination depending on their race, gender, age, ethnicity, physical ability, class or any other characteristic that might place them in a marginalized group. (Crenshaw, 1990)



There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.

Audre Lorde



Allies recognize the importance of intersectionality

- Know that personal identities have different implications regarding the discrimination and harassment people face
- Educate yourself on how gender inequity intersects with other identities e.g. race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, and other forms of oppression
- Support structures vary widely – those with multiple marginalized identities may seek out support less because of stigmas and fear of retribution. Intersectionality helps us realize everyone experiences the workplace differently

Allyship and anti-racism

- The primary goal for white people working to understand racism and be an anti-racist is not to learn how racism impacts people of color. The primary goal is to recognize how the system of racism shapes *our* lives, how we uphold that system, and how we might interrupt it. [White Fragility](#), 2018, Robin Diangelo.
- White people need to correct the systems that support white supremacy
- Important to recognize and acknowledge your white privilege before and during your allyship development process

Considerations in Starting the Allyship Journey



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Allyship prep work (which is never really done)

Practice
Cultural humility

- Deconstruct your own biases
- Recognize your privileges
- Get to know yourself – shift from individual notion of self to multi-dimensional view of self with multiple identities
- Be authentic – Say what you mean and mean what you say
- Differentiate between intent versus impact – it's the impact of words and actions that matter most

Potential impact of allyship on those with dominant identities

- Egalitarian men - stigmatized as more feminine, weak, and likely to be gay (Rudman, *et al.*, 2013)
- Men who are perceived as less self-promoting and more collaborative and power-sharing are evaluated as less competent and less masculine (Bosak, *et al.*, 2018)
- Sometimes you may face backlash from individuals you are trying to support and you may not always be welcome in certain spaces – be OK with that!

Impact of being an ally cont.

It is important to discuss potential barriers to men wanting to engage in allyship:

- #MeToo has led some men (and women) to see men as victims, as allies unfairly (or potentially unfairly) accused of harassment or unwanted behavior. Woe is Men.
- Surveys of men and women suggest that men (but not women) have a greater fear of invalid allegations of sexual harassment. (Atwater LE, et al. 2019)

Sources: <https://qz.com/1422215/metoo-backlash-will-2019-be-the-year-of-men/>,
<https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/one-year-of-metoo-what-womens-speech-is-still-not-allowed-to-do>

Challenges of being an ally

There are individual challenges we face to being effective allies that can be barriers to engaging in this work. It's important to recognize and find solutions for these challenges:

- Understanding your role
- Making mistakes and saying the wrong thing
- Knowing when to step in and when to step back
- Those you're allying with might not be ready to engage with you
- Being uncomfortable

Mentoring at risk?

Survey data suggests that men feel less sure regarding how to interact with women in the workplace. This may lead to decreased willingness for men to do the following with women:

- Mentoring
- Working late/alone
- Traveling to conferences
- Attending work-related meals or functions

Allyship should work to mitigate this by opening conversations to discuss options.

Men mentoring women post #MeToo Forbes 8-2018 Prudy Gourguechon
<https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2018/04/04/sexual-harassment-at-work-in-the-era-of-metoo/>

How to Practice Allyship



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Allyship is a journey

- Be willing to make mistakes, apologize, learn and try again.
- Be willing to be uncomfortable and have uncomfortable conversations.
- Be willing to confront your own privilege.
- Be aware that more often than not you cannot change others but you can support the person who is the target.

The importance of listening as an ally

“When you talk, you are only repeating what you already know. But if you listen, you may learn something new.”

-The Dalai Lama

Who's voice is being heard?

- Do with, not for. Good allyship means individuals from the group you are supporting should be in charge of the interactions and decision making.
- Recognize the importance of not only who has a seat at the table but also, who doesn't have a seat.



The 3 Ds: Debate, Discussion, and Dialogue

These three communication styles are distinct and allies try to engage in dialogue:

- **Debate** creates closed-minded attitude, a determination to be right. Individuals are considered to be autonomous and judged on individual intellectual might
- **Discussions** often assume an “equal playing field” with little or no attention to identity, status and power
- In **dialogue** exploring identities and differences are key elements in both the process and the content of the exchange

Be aware of performative allyship!

Performative allyship is when you take action or behave like an ally with the primary motivation of not appearing racist, sexist, etc. in order to increase your social capital, rather than devotion to the cause. Self-reflect about your allyship:

- Important to critically self-examine your motivations for wanting to be involved in allyship
- Is it only because this is currently a “hot topic”?
- Is it only because you are being asked to participate by your institution?
- Do you want others to think you’re “good” or “woke”?

What impact can allies have? Here's one story

[A Trip to the Grocery Store by Dr. Joy DeGruy](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GTvU7uUgjUI>

Take Action! Allyship Traits, Language, Do's and Don'ts



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Be uncomfortable

As we've explored so far, allyship is about going outside your comfort zone to support others. When considering action as an ally, try to think about ***going one step further, or making one more statement***, than you usually would feel comfortable doing in order to stand up and support others.

Responding to microaggressions

As an ally you can:

- Repeat back what is said
- Ask for more information (can you elaborate on that?)
- Play dumb; challenge the stereotype (e.g. I don't understand your joke. Can you explain it to me?)
- Separate intent from impact
- Tell them they're too smart to say something like that
- Point out policy/law that prohibits such conduct

Responding to harassment

- Most harassment is not the tip of the iceberg and egregious
- Gender harassment, the foundation of the iceberg, is more difficult to “see” but is the most common form
- Allies can point out more subtle “below the surface” examples of gender harassment to make it more visible
- Allies doing this validates others’ experiences



The words we use are important

- Quite often we are unaware that the language we use is laced with oppression
- Don't use "empower" – suggests individuals never had power. They have always had power so use "activate" or "amplify"
- Don't strive for "equality," strive for "equity." Equality is treating everyone the same, whereas equity is giving everyone what they need to be successful

The do's of allyship

- **Do** be open to listening
- **Do** be aware of your implicit biases
- **Do** your research to learn more about the history of the struggle in which you are participating
- **Do** the inner work to figure out a way to acknowledge how you participate in oppressive systems
- **Do** the outer work and figure out how to change the oppressive systems
- **Do** amplify (online and when physically present) the voices of those without your privilege

www.guidetoallyship.com

The don'ts of allyship

- **Do not** expect to be taught or shown. Take it upon yourself to use the tools around you to learn and answer your questions
- **Do not** participate for the gold medal in the Oppression Olympics – you're not trying to one-up someone with your own oppression or experiences, "I have it worse"
- **Do not** behave as though you know best
- **Do not** take credit for the labor of those who are marginalized and did the work before you stepped into the picture
- **Do not** assume that every member of a marginalized group feels oppressed
- Do not take breaks from being an ally
- Don't make it about you

Reframing “allyship” as the concept evolves...

I don't want an ally. Because an ally means you came here to help me ... How are you helping me solve the problem you caused? Why aren't I helping you solve the problem you caused?

Why am I not the ally, and you the actor?

Why is Blackness the responsibility holder and whiteness gets to be the helper?

Sonya Renee Taylor

Self-reflection is important but not the only action



No White Savors
@nowhitesaviors

Many “allies” seem to get stuck in the “learning & unpacking privilege” phase. Few seem to really be committed to taking real risks or making significant sacrifices. Being *aware* of your privilege isn’t reparations and it isn’t making this world safer for Black people.



No White Savors
@nowhitesaviors

How revolutionary is our anti-racism work if it isn’t galvanizing people to actively dismantle the global system of white supremacy? We can’t afford to sit in academic ivory towers. Can’t get stuck theorizing or pontificating about oppression in place of **ACTUALIZING** justice.

Other emerging terms

Allyship, it's meaning, connotations, and actions are evolving even as we speak. In considering your own allyship journey, it's important to recognize the emerging terms some are using instead of "allyship". Both **co-conspirator** and **accomplice** have been used recently instead of allyship to convey the action-oriented nature of allyship and emphasize the dismantling of power systems, disrupting the status quo.

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