

## **WORKING DEFINITIONS**

**PREJUDICE:** Inaccurate and/or negative beliefs about a group of people. Prejudice is manifested through attitudes, behavior and/or lack of access to equal opportunity jobs, education, etc.

**DISCRIMINATION:** Action based on prejudice.

**OPPRESSION:** Denied access to power.

divides people

becomes the consciousness of the people

institutionally reinforced

economic and social imbalances

**ISM:** The institutionalization of collective prejudice resulting in a system of advantage based on one race, gender, ability, age, sexual orientation, religion, class, etc. over another. The subjugation of marginalized social groups/identities is supported by cultural beliefs, stereotyping and institutional practices.

**PRIVILEGE:** Unearned benefits that accrue to dominant groups based upon skin color, gender, sex, class, ability, religion, etc.; awards or advantages given to dominant groups without earning and/or asking for them. Privilege is usually invisible to the receiver.

**INTERNALIZED** (any one of the isms): The conscious or unconscious acceptance by a person of a targeted group of the underlying assumptions of that ism. This is a root cause of the injustice people of a targeted group may show toward each other.

**ALLY BEHAVIOR:** Active behavior by a member of a dominant group (in the case of racism, by a white person) to dismantle the oppression of a target group (in the case of racism, people of color).

# DEFINITIONS OF AN ALLY

Being an ally is the process of working to develop individual attitudes, institutions, and a culture in which people...feel they matter. This work is motivated by an enlightened self-interest to end oppression.

J. Jay Scott and Vernon Wall, 1991

A person who believes that all persons should be treated with dignity and respect. Furthermore, any person who works towards combating the “isms” on both personal and institutional levels.

Adapted from Joseph Bertolino, East Stroudsburg University

A person who is a member of the ‘dominant’ or ‘majority’ group who works to end oppression in his or her personal and professional life through support of, and as an advocate with and for, the oppressed population.

Jamie Washington and Nancy Evans in  
Beyond Tolerance: Gays, Lesbians and Bisexuals on Campus

# FOUR BASIC LEVELS OF BECOMING AN ALLY

## Awareness

Who am I, and how am I different?

## Knowledge/Education

Learn about the group's history, culture, norms, experiences, contributions, organizations, etc.

How do laws, policies, stereotypes, myths, institutions and common practices impact individuals and the group as a whole?

## Skills

Develop skills in communicating what you have learned. These skills can be developed by participating in training sessions, role playing, developing a support network, or choosing safe environments to practice your advocacy skills.

## Action

This can be the most frightening, but most critical step.

Be prepared to deal with the risks that come with action.

If you choose not to act, pay attention to the impact your inaction has on you and the target group.

Action is the only way to affect change. Keeping awareness, knowledge and skills to ourselves will not change systems.

From Jamie Washington and Nancy Evans, "Becoming an Ally" in Evans, N. and Wall, V. (1991) Beyond Tolerance: Gays, Lesbians and Bisexuals on Campus: ACPA Press.

# ALLIES...

- Work towards an understanding of the history, culture, feelings, struggles, pride & needs of the group(s) for whom they are allies.
- Understand the history, culture, feelings, struggles, pride & needs of groups in which they are members.
- Listen to members of the target group(s) and respect their experiences as truth.
- Respond to the needs of the target group(s).
- Work to be allies all the time.
- Believe that it is in their self-interest to be allies.
- Do not expect rewards for “Doing the Right Thing.”
- Are committed to embarking on the inward personal journey required of allies.
- Take responsibility for initiating and implementing personal, institutional, & societal justice and equality.
- Communicate the contributions and successes of the target group(s) to others.
- Have a good sense of humor and use it appropriately.
- Work to understand the root of problems encountered by the target group(s).
- Spend time immersed in the communities for which they are allies.
- Expect support from, and give support to, other allies.
- Expect to make mistakes, but do not use them as excuses for non-action.
- Are aware of ways they have received unearned privileges.
- Recognize they always have a lot to learn and actively seek ways to learn it.
- Understand and can articulate how oppression has impacted their lives—both as victims and as villains.
- Recognize that they contribute to an oppressive system, and do not work to deny that.
- Support members of the target group in dealing with issues of internalized oppression.
- Recognize that using guilt to motivate them to be allies sets up a power differential between them and the target group(s).

Adapted by Kathleen Rice, from Shawn-Eric Brooks and Vernon A. Wall, 1990

## HOW CAN I BE AN ALLY?

- ❖ Educate self and others.
- ❖ Go to programs, read, discuss, join organizations, make friends in target groups.
- ❖ Vote as an ally.
- ❖ Write letters—to victims, to those who are in the position to make changes.
- ❖ Reinforce other allies working to change the system, publicly show your support of allies who speak out.
- ❖ Speak up—confront publications, polices, jokes, inappropriate language, name calling, stereotypes, myths, etc.
- ❖ Counter the negative messages children learn about people. Provide them with positive, realistic images of people through conversation, books, video, or your own examples.
- ❖ Participate in marches, rallies, committees.
- ❖ Avoid making assumptions about what people want or need. Being an ally doesn't mean speaking for someone who is in a target group. Rather it means speaking from your own experience as a member of a non-target group.
- ❖ Your consistent actions will show people you are an ally—simply telling them will not.
- ❖ Ensure diversity in all you do—in conversations, programs, social activities, awards, leadership opportunities, hiring, etc.
- ❖ Create environments where issues can be discussed.
- ❖ Don't "blame the victim." Try to understand their experience.
- ❖ Stifle the desire to automatically defend the person of your same race, gender, sexual orientation or religion. Listen first, then question their actions before you respond.
- ❖ Wear buttons and t-shirts or display stickers and posters that express your support for those with whom you are an ally. Reinforce others who do the same.
- ❖ Use inclusive, sensitive, and appropriate language and humor.
- ❖ Don't expect members of the target group to teach you to be an ally or to thank you when you act as one.

## STRATEGIES FOR BEING AN EFFECTIVE ALLY: AGENT PERSPECTIVE

1. Assume that all people in your own group, including yourself, want to be allies to people in other groups. Assume that you in particular are good enough and smart enough to be an effective ally. (This does not mean that you have nothing more to learn.)
2. Assume that you have a perfect right to be concerned with other people's liberation issues, and that it is in your own interest to do so and to be an ally.
3. Assume that all people in the target group want members of your group and you in particular as an ally. Assume that they recognize you as such—at least potentially.
4. Assume that any appearances to the contrary (any apparent rejections of you as an ally) are the result of target group people's experience of oppression and internalized oppression.
5. Assume that people in the target group are already communicating to you in the best way they can at the present time. Assume that they can and will do better. Think about how to assist them in this without making your support dependent upon their "improving" in any way. (Think about what has been helpful for you when you were in the target group position.)
6. Assume that the target group people are experts on their own experience, and that you have much to learn from them. Use your own intelligence and your own experience as a target group member to think about what the target group people/person might find useful. In doing so, acknowledge and recognize your cultural conditioning that may become a filter or lens.
7. Recognize that as a person in a power place, you are an expert on the experience of having been conditioned to take an oppressive role. This means that you know the content of the lies that target group people have internalized. Don't let your temporary state of fear in being bold force you into pretended ignorance.
8. Assume that target group people are survivors and that they have a long history of resistance. Become an expert on this history and assist target group people to take full pride in it.
9. Become an expert on all issues that are of concern to people in the target group, especially the issues which are most closely tied to their internalized oppression. Assume that making mistakes is part of the learning process of being an ever more effective ally. Be prepared for flare-ups of disappointment and criticism. Acknowledge and apologize for mistakes; learn from them; AND don't retreat. This is the expectation as a result of being mistreated, and having learned to expect it along with abandonment.
10. Recognize that people in the target group can spot "oppressor-role conditioning"; do not bother with trying to "convince" them that this conditioning did not happen to you. Don't attempt to convince target group people that you "are on their side"; just be there.
11. Do not expect "gratitude" from people in the target group; thoughtfully interrupt if it is offered to you. Remember, being an ally is a matter of your choice. It is not an obligation: it is something you get to do.
12. Be a 100% ally, no deal, no strings attached—no "I'll oppose your oppression if you oppose mine." Everyone's oppression needs to be opposed unconditionally.

## Building Allies

Objectives:

- Building teams around us who really know how to support us.
- Taking charge of those relationships—coaching people.
- Having your relationship with your ally based on appreciation.

Each step contradicts a major piece of leadership oppression.

1. **Appreciate your Ally. What do you notice about them? Why do you love to be around them?**
2. **Identify what you have to offer as an Ally. What are your gifts to people who get to be around you?** (*Really try to look. If you had something to offer, what's the best you have to give? If you don't know, you won't be able to give it.*)
3. **How do you struggle as a leader?** (*E.g., don't feel deserving, want to control things, etc. This is usually hooked to our identity—white, female, etc. The more genuine you can be about this piece, the better people will be able to support you.*)
4. **How do you envision your growth around this struggle? How would you like your leadership to grow? What's the big picture?** (*We function on top of so much powerlessness about the way things are, we need to reclaim our own power.*)  
  
**What would be a next step?** (*Small bites, winnable victories. This is a contradiction to the struggle—180° from the struggle.*)
5. **What concrete coaching can you give to your Ally to support you in this step?**

Everything is an opportunity to stretch and grow. What's the next opportunity to do this? Do before and after workshops—around tasks, etc.—it's never done.

When we try to be Allies we often try to take over each other's struggles ("Oh you poor thing; here, let me help"), or abandon them ("Oh, you can do it").

The goal is to come away with concrete things—ways we can stretch immediately; ways Allies can support each other.

## Ricky's Writings

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### **Working Assumptions and Guidelines for Alliance-Building**

— By Ricky Sherover-Marcuse

*Since, under present world conditions, everyone either is now, or has been, or will be at some time a target of social oppression, and since everyone is now, or has been, or will be in a non-target group in relation to some other group's oppression, alliance-building is for everyone.*

*Everyone of us needs allies, and everyone of us can take the role of an ally for someone else. The following guidelines are based on this premise. They should be equally applicable from the perspective of the target and the non-target group.*

### **STRATEGIES FOR WINNING ALLIES**

1. Assume that you and all members of your group deserve allies.
2. Assume that your liberation issues are justifiably of concern to all people outside your group.
3. Assume that people in other groups are your natural allies; assume that all people outside your group want to be allies for you and that it is in their interest for them to do so.
4. Assume that it is only other people's own oppression and internalized oppression that prevents them (temporarily) from being effective allies to you at all times.
5. Assume that your allies are doing the best they can at the present time, given their own oppression and internalized oppression. Assume that they can and will do better.
6. Assume that you are the expert on your own experience and that you have information which other people need to hear.
7. Speak from your own experience without comparing your oppression to theirs.
8. Assume that your experience is also an experience of victories; be sure to share these- as well as the stories of how things are hard.
9. Expect perfection from your allies; expect them to be able to deal with the "difficult issues" in your struggle. Assume that allies make mistakes; be prepared to be disappointed, and continue to expect the best from them.

10. Assume that you have a perfect right to assist your allies to become more effective for you. Assume that you can choose to do this at any time. Take full pride in your ability to do this.

### **STRATEGIES FOR BEING AN EFFECTIVE ALLY**

1. Assume that all people in your own group including yourself want to be allies to people in other groups. Assume that you are good enough and smart enough to be an effective ally. (This does not mean that you have nothing more to learn- see # 6, below.)
2. Assume that you have a perfect right to be concerned with other people's liberation issues, and that it is in your own interest to do so and to be an ally.
3. Assume that all people in the target group want you and members of your group as allies. Assume that they recognize you as such- at least potentially.
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# The Empathic Collapse: Thoughts from Tim Wise and Angela Davis

POSTED ON [MAY 14, 2011](#) BY [MICHAL "MJ" JONES](#)

[HTTPS://MICHALJONES.WORDPRESS.COM/2011/05/14/THE-EMPATHIC-COLLAPSE-THOUGHTS-FROM-TIM-WISE-AND-ANGELA-DAVIS/](https://michaljones.wordpress.com/2011/05/14/the-empathic-collapse-thoughts-from-tim-wise-and-angela-davis/)

Last night, Friday, May 13th, I had the amazing opportunity to attend Angela Davis and Tim Wise in discussion in Oakland on one of the many event trips that Residential Life offers. I was one of only two other students who signed up to attend the event, a number which I found surprising and disheartening. I have gotten used to the general apathy our student body has shown toward these types of events, unless attendance is required or there is possible extra-credit involved, but both myself and the staff member that attended with us were surprised by the short list.

The event was publicized widely enough that it reached the entire student body, as many low-attendance events with Sonoma are. People just had more important things to do than talk about white privilege, racism, immigration reform, the current state of economics, Islamophobia, and community organizing, among other things. Hangovers needed nursing, sleep needed to be had, and people needed to go to dances. But, more likely than not, I would argue that the topics at hand were not interesting enough to our students. If they had offered a trip to see the stars from Jersey Shore, I'm sure the vans would be packed. But, I digress.

What Tim commented on towards the very beginning, and what he thinks has happened in America, is what he called an "empathic collapse." The reason, he argues, that we don't think about those who are incarcerated, for example, is that we think that "they" are not "us." Angela constantly built upon this point throughout the talk, in reference to targeted groups of people: "Sometimes we assume that it is up to those most affected by these issues to carry out all of the struggle alone."

This is a theme that has been seen within many historical justice movements, such as the women's movement and even in Black liberation. Black liberation, as Angela argued, meant

liberation for Black men. And, as Audre Lorde wrote about multiple times, many White women in the women's movement were indifferent about issues affecting women of color and the gay and lesbian communities. We have no empathy for the "other" nor no reason or obligation to align ourselves with their struggles.

Going back to Sonoma State, what reason would the typical White, upper-middle class student have for attending this event? Only when a situation affects the majority is it talked about, such as the millions of Whites that are now unemployed, joining the many more unemployed people of color who have been facing the same struggles for years. In America, we find ways to justify what happens to the majority by blaming it on the minority. Whites are losing their jobs because of illegal aliens and affirmative action. There is no effort to examine privilege in this country, so why should I be surprised that this attitude is often reflected in students at a PWI?

I agree that something needs to be done about this empathic collapse. I often remind myself that social justice means advocating for equity for everyone, not just the groups that I belong to. I think the first realization that needs to happen, as Davis commented upon (and as Lorde has in her piece *Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference*) is an acceptance of the interconnectedness of all people. We need to bring these issues together, not continue to see them as separate. I cannot talk about Black issues without addressing gay and lesbian issues, because there are hundreds and thousands of gay and lesbian Black people. We need to make the unseen groups seen and understand that they each fit into one another.

I don't know how to get started on this by myself, but maybe it starts by setting goals. I think I'll spend the summer educating myself about issues faced by those who have disabilities, and both undocumented and documented immigrants in this country. They, and everyone else, are connected to me.