

## WHAT IS AN ALLY?

An ally is someone who:

- a) **adopts an identity** as someone in a social position of moral responsibility to advocate for members of a group;
- b) **adopts moral obligations** to that group in virtue of taking up a social position as an ally; and
- c) **actively works** against the oppression that harms individuals within the group.

When adopting this identity, an ally assumes some power to act in a group's interest and to speak on its behalf. That is why allies, "have moral obligations in virtue of their social positions as allies that they might not have had prior to adopting that status" (Blankschaen, 6). This means that moral action is expected from the ally. Moreover, the ally's moral actions have to be acknowledged or recognized as allyship by the affected group. "An ally who actively works against oppression but neglects to acknowledge [the affected group]...is committing a moral wrong by using their assumed moral license to act on behalf of a group" whose members do not believe the ally represents what it means to be a victim of oppression (Chepeka, 13).

It matters that allies accept their role as people with responsibilities to a group to be *good* allies. To say, *I am an ally to x group of people*, is to say *I am* (adoption of identity) *an ally* (identity role) *to* (with moral obligations to) *x group of people* (group claiming to be represented by the ally/acceptance by group of ally identity).

As you can probably tell from these explanations, the moral obligations of an ally often go far beyond what someone is really capable of doing, but it is still important to try to achieve these ends anyway in order to combat oppression.

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### Works Cited

Blankschaen, Kurt. "Allied Identities". Ir.lib.uwo.ca. N. p., 2017. Web. 30 Nov. 2017. Retrieved from: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1051&context=fpq>

Chepeka, Collin. "Allyship & Feminism: An Exploration of the Roles and Priorities of Feminists" 2017 Symposium at Trent University.

**QUESTIONS?** Not everyone agrees about what it means to be an ally. Answers to the following questions are contested.

- Who decides whether someone is an ally, the ally or members of the community the ally supports?
- Does being a straight ally (i.e. an ally who is heterosexual) amount to exerting or reinforcing straight privilege?
- Can a member of the LGBTQ community be an ally to other LGBTQ people?
- Are allies to be counted as members of the communities of people they support?
- Can one 'come out' as an ally?

## HOW TO BE AN ALLY

**Educate yourself** about different identities and different experiences. Do some research--there is a lot of information available (especially on the internet). Read works by queer authors. Watch films by and about members of the LGBTQ community. Engage with current events. Ask questions if there is something you do not understand and listen to the answers.

**Listen** to the experiences and perspectives of queer-identified people. Trust and respect that these are valid experiences and perspectives.

**Be honest** with yourself by reflecting on your own assumptions, prejudices, and biases.

**Respect** that coming out is not a one-time event, that in coming out to you a person is trusting you with something important, and that the decision to come out is the person's own to make.

**Be open and accepting.** When someone comes out to you, he/she/ze is not seeking your permission, approval, or judgement.

**Respect people** by using the name and pronouns each person prefers you to use when referring to her/zer/him.

**Avoid assumptions** about whether or not someone identifies with an equity-seeking group and about what it means to be a member of such a group—there is significant diversity in every community.

**Accept feedback**, but do not rely on LGBTQ friends and family to do the work of correcting you all of the time.

**Correct your mistakes** (when you use the wrong pronoun, for instance) and move on.

**Signal your support.** A pride button on your bag or a rainbow flag by your door are small things that serve as clear signals of acceptance and support.

**Act** to make the world safer for and more inclusive of the people you support. Speak up when you encounter offensive behaviour and language. Act to remove barriers by supporting civil rights and equality while challenging prejudices.

**Empower** the people you support; they are not looking for you to be their hero (it is really not about you).

**Remain steadfast** even when this causes you to be uncomfortable or to take on extra work.