



Being a Better Ally: Undertaking Self Inquiry Worksheet

2021

Reframing Allyship

In partnership with the Rare Community, a group of 1,000 truly diverse individuals from around the globe, we researched and reflected on Allyship – it's meaning, how Allyship is implemented, and its potential to drive meaningful change in the world. Through this collaboration we uncovered a sad truth – the term Allyship has lost its meaning.

The Rare Community shared that a limited understanding of the practice of Allyship often reduces the practice to performative gestures such as rainbow flags over pride; or a hosting half day inclusion workshops without any resulting policy or process change from leadership teams. That performative Allyship undermines Allyships transformative potential.

Allyship in action should not be about performance. Rather Allyship should be framed as the utilisation of an individual's privilege and power to drive systemic change, For example, changing how we recruit, reward, remunerate, promote, communicate and behave.

Allyship also demands that we are accomplices and co-conspirators – working together hand in hand with minority and/or marginalised communities to drive the needed change. In *Be A Better Ally* by Tsedale M. Melaku, Angie Beeman, David G. Smith, and W. Brad Johnson they summed this up perfectly:

“We view allyship as a strategic mechanism used by individuals to become collaborators, accomplices, and co-conspirators who fight injustice and promote equity in the workplace through supportive personal relationships and public acts of sponsorship and advocacy. Allies endeavor to drive systemic improvements to workplace policies, practices, and culture.”

Source: <https://hbr.org/2020/11/be-a-better-ally>

A Way Forward: Self Inquiry

The Rare Community shared a first step to being a better ally and driving change - to undertake Self Inquiry. Self inquiry, with roots in meditative practices, is the process of turning your attention inwards to become more aware of 'I': who you are.

In the context of Allyship, Self Inquiry is a reflective tool to critically question and inquire into what shapes, enables or hinders us. Self Inquiry is the process of turning the strategic design lens on yourself, in order to develop an effective allyship practice and create structural and systemic change in our sphere of influence.

3 Ways To Undertake Self Inquiry

Self Inquiry requires looking at yourself with intense personal honesty - and in the context of allyship the focus is on uncovering your biases, privilege and power.

1. Bias

We all have biases. And by biases we mean the widely accepted definition that they are learned stereotypes that are automatic, unintentional, deeply ingrained, universal, and able to influence behaviour.

The word is negatively loaded but it simply refers to our brains programming responding one way or another as a result of external factors. These external factors include things such as the area we grew up in and live; the people we count as close friends; the society we are shaped by; the media we read and absorb.

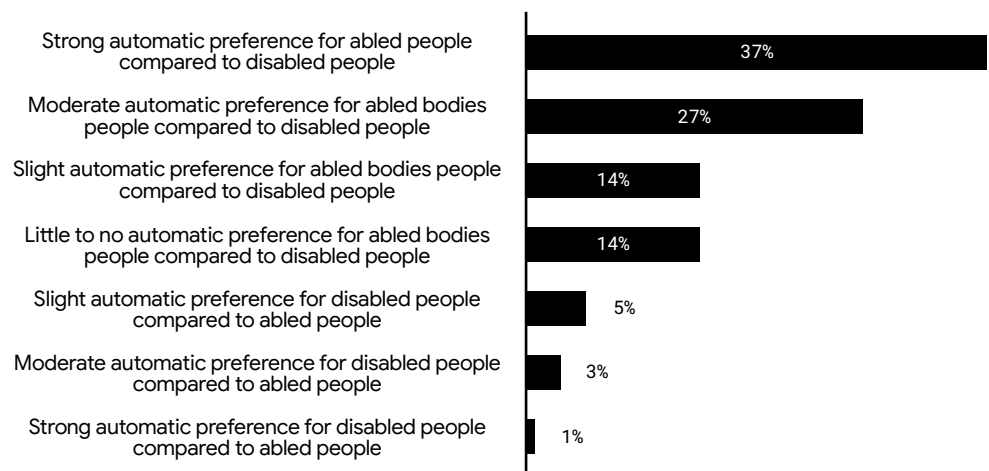
We often cannot change our biases due to how deeply ingrained they are, but if we understand where we might hold biases, through a process of self-inquiry, we can mitigate their effects and be a better ally.

Examining your influences at key stages of your life is an effective self-inquiry method to identify and understand your biases. For example, take time to reflect on the demographic make-up of where you grew up examining who were the dominant groups, who were marginalised and who were simply not represented. If you grew up in a predominantly white, able-bodied, cis and heteronormative environment your biases will reflect this.

Additionally, tests like the Implicit Associations Tests (IAT) measure the strength of evaluations of different communities - unearthing whether or not you have implicit preferences toward them.

The reality is many of our biases are universal, for example, according to the United Nations Development Programme, 90% of the world is biased against women. And aggregated data of the IAT Disability Test show that 78% of people are negatively biased towards disabled people.

Percent of web respondents with each score



This distribution summarises 305,739 iat scores for the disability task completed between april 2004 and december 2015

2. Privilege

Privilege is the unearned access to social power based on membership to a dominant group. It can feel a very charged term as it refers to the part of our identities that we never have to question, simply because they blend into the norms around us.

Because of this, checking privilege can sometimes feel like an accusation. We may feel that it diminishes our hard work or our struggles or barriers we overcame to get where we are. Or, we may be from a marginalised group and feel like we hold no privilege as a result.

Most people will have some privilege. In the Western world, if you are White or Christian or middle-class or non-disabled or heterosexual you hold some privilege. Privilege means that you do not face systemic barriers or oppression.

Recognising privilege simply means being aware that some people must work much harder to experience the things we take for granted, if they even have the chance to experience them at all.

Privilege is not something we should feel ashamed of - it is something we were simply born into and have little influence over. The powerful action is to understand and recognise your privilege, through a process of self inquiry, as by doing this you can leverage your privilege to create more equitable outcomes for others in society.

As the University of San Francisco put it:

“Being aware of privilege should not be seen as a burden or source of guilt, but rather, an opportunity to learn and be responsible so that we may work toward a more just and inclusive world.”

Asking yourself questions like the ones below are really useful in locating your privileges:

Did I ever unwillingly go hungry?

Did my parents/carers have enough income to pay the rent/mortgage each month?

Have I ever been questioned about my choice to work and be a parent?

Have I ever experienced racism?

Have I ever not been able to physically access a place?

Can I hold hands with my partner without fear?

Do people question my gender or use of pronouns?

3. Power

As much as people care about creating more inclusive businesses, they often feel as if they don't hold enough power to actually do anything. But this is simply not the case - we all have agency in the workplace.

Being part of a team. Socialising with colleagues. Running or managing meetings. Making decisions on recruitment and promotion. These moments are loaded with transformative potential.

For example, if you run or manage a meeting you have the power to make this meeting inclusive to everyone. To ensure every voice is heard, no-one is spoken over and all perspectives are considered equally.

Likewise if you make hiring decisions you have the power to ensure the process is inclusive, the long list and short list is representative, the interview is accessible to everyone etc.

Through a process of self-inquiry we can identify the power we have which helps us to understand where we can, as allies, make systemic change. Leadership is about recognising where this power lies and empowering others to use their influence to create equitable outcome.

Reflect On Your Bias, Privilege and Power

Self Inquiry into the intersection of biases, privilege and power provides a foundation from which to be a better ally. It's only by being honest with ourselves about our biases and privilege that we can recognise the lens which may distort our actions as an ally. And it's only by understanding our power that we can identify where we can focus our allyship efforts.

True understanding of our bias, privilege and power comes from deep work - for example building cultural intelligence, conversing with communities different to our own. To support your Self Inquiry journey we have included a very simple form for you to use below. As part of your commitment to allyship, take 5 minutes to reflect on your bias, privilege and power and start your Self Inquiry journey today.

WHAT BIASES DO I HAVE?
WHAT PRIVILEGE DO I HAVE?
WHAT POWER DO I HAVE?

Further Resources

Harvard Implicit Associations Test (IAT)	The Implicit Associations Test (IAT) can help uncover your hidden biases by measuring your evaluations of different groups.
Kimberlé Crenshaw on what intersectionality means to her today	Kimberlé Crenshaw, the law professor at Columbia and UCLA who coined the term intersectionality to describe the way people's social identities can overlap, tells TIME about the politicization of her idea, its lasting relevance and why all inequality is not created equal.
\$100 Race	This video visualises the role privilege plays in creating unearned advantage.

Glossary

Accomplce:	Being willing to act with and for oppressed peoples and accepting the potential fallout from doing so.
Allyship:	A lifelong process of building relationships based on trust, consistency, and accountability with marginalized individuals and/or groups of people.
Bias:	Inclination or prejudice for or against one person or group.
Performative:	Actions that primarily function to boost social capital rather than affect actual change.
Privilege:	A special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group.
Systemic barriers:	Policies, practices or procedures that result in some people receiving unequal access or being excluded.

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Thank you