

# Cultural Humility and Allyship in Action

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**Abstract:** This narrative describes the crucial foundational role that we as social work practitioners and educators believe cultural humility plays in enacting genuine allyship. Two female faculty of color and one female White faculty share their personal and professional experiences of marginalization, privilege, cultural humility, and allyship in an effort to illustrate these concepts. Routes to authentic cultural humility and allyship are explored and applications for those of us in the helping professions are suggested.

**Keywords:** cultural competence, cultural humility, allyship, social work

## Introduction

Within the helping professions—psychology, mental health counseling, nursing, and social work—there is a commitment to practice that is culturally competent. As practitioners, we care not just about the work we do, but with whom we do it, informed by who our clients are as unique, multifaceted individuals. The profession of social work is rooted in six core values: service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, the importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], n.d.). Social work curricula must demonstrate how core competencies and related practice behaviors are operationalized. As a profession that explicitly states a commitment to social justice and unimpeded services to all, social work has also developed cultural competence standards to which we make a career-long commitment. As social work practitioners, there is an intentional effort to not only be self-aware but also engage in reflection about the work we do.

Whereas cultural competency is positioned in a context of a professional becoming competent in a culture, suggesting a static place of knowledge and skill, cultural humility intentionally recognizes and integrates the dynamic nature of one’s own self-awareness, reflection, and critique (Fisher-Borne et al., 2014; Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998), for both the client and practitioner. The practice of cultural humility juxtaposes the lived experience, that it is ever changing and evolving and based on one’s daily lived encounters. Scholarly literature (e.g., Fisher-Borne et al., 2014; Foronda et al., 2016) identifies the expanding shift from cultural competence, the “us” versus “them” perspective that focuses on the knowledge and skill of the practitioner which, once attained, equates with competency, to the practice of cultural humility, “us together.” For the practitioner, cultural humility requires an ongoing awareness of self, one’s own identities, how they intersect with dynamics of power, privilege, and oppression, and ultimately influence interactions with others. Cultural humility attends to the critiques of cultural competence: “. . . knowledge acquisition, [lack of] social justice [focus], . . . ‘cookbook’ approach . . . stereotyping . . . suggests an endpoint” (Fisher-Borne et al., 2014, p.172). Cultural humility is centered around a practitioner’s own self-awareness, willingness to recognize their own power and privileges of their social identities, ways this influences relationships with others, and how these dynamics may be leveraged to the benefit of those who are marginalized and disenfranchised towards a more authentic representation of what it means to engage and integrate cultural differences. This is the fullness of recognizing the diversity of one’s self and

1 that of others in a way that is authentic, genuine, transparent, and welcoming of feedback from  
2 others. As noted by Fisher-Borne et al. (2014), cultural humility is suggested as an alternative,  
3 not complement, to cultural competency. It is these qualities that facilitate the development and  
4 workings of true allyship.

5  
6 As social workers, it has been a consistent component of our developing professional practice to,  
7 at the least, be self-reflective: for example, with the use of process recordings, which document  
8 verbatim client-worker accounts and then challenge us to identify not only our external  
9 “professional” response, but also implicit, subjective attitudes, biases, and behaviors that are  
10 stimulated from our work with clients. Through this activity, we were taught to become  
11 culturally competent in our professional practice. In reflection, there was no prompt or  
12 intentional aspect in the development of this professional skill that challenged us deeper around  
13 our implicit biases. Essentially, we were taught to be objective and competent, with no deeper  
14 reflection of our unique, diverse selves and ways it informed our work.

15  
16 As part of teaching multicultural practice and cultural competency or humility embedded in the  
17 knowledge of structures of privilege and oppression in the helping professions, the idea of  
18 allyship has evolved. The concept of allyship is easily understood in the stripped-down version  
19 of itself. Casually, the word “ally” is taken to mean a friend, a companion, or perhaps a helper.  
20 There has been, however, somewhat of a movement to shed light on what allyship *is* among  
21 professionals (DeTurk, 2011) and what it can *do* within relationships (Harris & Moritz, 2007;  
22 Rader, 2008). Models of allyship have identified key attitudes and beliefs (Gibson, 2014).  
23 Critique of these models includes the subjectivity in declaring oneself an ally. In this essay, we  
24 assert that being an ally is a construct of not only values, beliefs, and skills, but ultimately  
25 action. The co-authors of this essay find that the evolution from cultural competency to cultural  
26 humility resonates with us as practitioners and educators and we will share our ideas about how  
27 cultural humility is a critical foundation for allyship.

### 28 29 **Co-Authors’ Positionality**

30  
31 *Castagna:* As a first-generation Haitian American, I had only known the world from a place of  
32 disenfranchisement. I grew up in the Black enclave of a big city. Everyone was working class  
33 poor and Black with the exception of a few very poor and desolate White families. My family’s  
34 status as Blacks made us targets for the Whites. Yet, our status as immigrants made us targets for  
35 the Blacks. My educational attainment and professional career status propelled me into new and  
36 different social locations. Furthermore, I became aware not only of my places of oppression but  
37 also my places of privilege. Strangers, colleagues, clients, and students see me and assume that  
38 as a Black woman, I am likely from a poor, undereducated, and likely foreign background. They  
39 also make assumptions about my gender and sexual orientation. Indeed, I am a cisgender  
40 heterosexual woman and this identity affords me certain privileges. While attending a women’s  
41 college as an undergraduate, I learned that there were Blacks who came from very wealthy  
42 backgrounds; that there were women who identified as lesbians and bisexuals who were also  
43 women of color; that there were women with disabilities who faced daily structural obstacles  
44 that my own able-bodied privilege had not allowed me to see. I learned about intersectionality by  
45 living it—you can be oppressed in some ways and still have privilege in others. I was humbled

1 to know the people I thought were so different from me were also part of my same groups, my  
2 circle of friends, my own family.

3

4 *Wendy*: I am first generation American for my family. My parents emigrated from Jamaica in the  
5 late '60s. Upon arrival, my mom learned she was pregnant with me. Even before my birth, I was  
6 a threat to the envisioned *American Dream*. Having left behind two young children in the care of  
7 her mother, my mother came as a domestic worker. Not yet married, as this complicated the  
8 immigration process, my father left behind his own two sons from a previous relationship. My  
9 family was working class, though my parents were able to buy their own home. The  
10 neighborhood where I grew up was diverse and largely working class, though nearby public  
11 housing projects suggested the working poor and poverty stricken of our community. Like many  
12 in our community, I was of color. But being from the Caribbean, with parents who had linguistic  
13 accents, ate different foods, and listened to "weird" music, I experienced being stereotyped  
14 because of my cultural differences. Even within my family and support network, I was often  
15 alienated. I was American born, which meant I was a *Yankee* and not a *real* Jamaican and this  
16 somehow made me different from others within my family. Even now as someone who holds a  
17 PhD, I still feel largely perceived by my race, and sometimes gender, because of the many  
18 stereotypes about Black women. I regularly encounter stereotypes regarding my ethnicity. I  
19 don't like when it is assumed that I am African American without being asked. I have had  
20 colleagues who will introduce me as such, without even asking me how I identify. My culture is  
21 very important to me and not being asked feels dismissive. Though I still regularly experience  
22 moments of disadvantage to which I attribute largely to race, I also recognize the many  
23 privileges I have being a college educated, cisgender, able-bodied, heterosexual United States  
24 citizen.

25

26 *Judith*: I grew up part of a White, culturally Jewish, professional family of teachers who were  
27 civil rights activists. My parents' divorce put us into working class status as my mother furthered  
28 her education and found gainful employment. When my mother came out as a lesbian in my  
29 childhood, I became acutely aware of marginalization based on sexual orientation. My parents'  
30 friends and colleagues were ethnically and racially diverse, and I was lucky to attend alternative  
31 schools. But it was not until after earning my MSW and working in the criminal justice system  
32 that I began to more fully understand systemic racism, classism, and the criminalization of  
33 poverty and mental illness. My commitment to work for social justice and to use my privilege in  
34 allyship grew. I am a cisgender, straight-passing bisexual, PhD educated woman with White  
35 privilege. Striving for cultural humility takes consistent attention, both professionally and  
36 personally, while actively working toward racial and social justice. I work to embrace a  
37 continual process of looking inward to uncover the less obvious shapes my privilege takes, as  
38 well as looking outward to absorb others' experiences of oppression and appreciate cultures  
39 different from mine. I attempt to move through my guilt about my White privilege and to use my  
40 privilege to advocate for changes in policies and practices that support structural racism and  
41 oppression. This involves continuing to learn about engaging in allyship with those from  
42 historically marginalized groups. I have made many mistakes. I have missed the mark on true  
43 collaboration, imposing my ideas on individuals from historically marginalized groups, thinking  
44 I was being helpful. I have led when I should have listened. I have let my anger at injustice  
45 distance me from the very people and systems I seek to change. I have remained silent when I

1 needed to speak out against oppression. I see that my responsibility includes acknowledging my  
2 mistakes and learning from them. This learning has only been possible in mutual, collaborative,  
3 respectful friendships with others who are also committed to racial and social justice.

### 4 5 **Relationship Between Genuine Cultural Humility and Allyship** 6

7 *Castagna*: Being a member of several disenfranchised groups gave me the false belief of cultural  
8 competence. Only after understanding intersectionality and cultural humility was I able to truly  
9 find my way into being an ally. Being a *good person*, and a social worker, meant that I was *open*  
10 *minded* and never sought to harm others in any way. However, this is not the definition of an  
11 ally. In order to enact authentic allyship one must have cultural humility. The two concepts are  
12 interrelated in that the thoughtful reflection of cultural humility is what can lead to the necessary  
13 action required of true allyship. Social service practitioners can read about and *understand*  
14 various cultures, but culture is not a stagnant group of facts to be memorized. It is not a set of  
15 tools to be used in an assessment and then put away. At a deeper level than cultural competence,  
16 “cultural humility offers social workers an alternative approach that focuses on knowledge of  
17 self in relation to others, acknowledges the dynamic nature of culture, and challenges barriers  
18 that impact marginalized communities on both individual and institutional levels” (Fisher-Borne  
19 et al., 2014, p. 172). Cultural humility allows a person to see the power imbalances but does not  
20 necessarily give one the courage to act as an ally. You must be willing to use your privilege and  
21 positions of power despite any associated risk when acting as an ally.

22  
23 *Wendy*: As a person who has experienced, and continues to encounter, discriminatory dynamics,  
24 I assumed this advantaged me to be inherently competent regarding culture. As someone who  
25 has been called racial slurs, been ignored and sidestepped, I knew enough not to replicate these  
26 oppressive practices, at least in an overt kind of way. Cultural humility has challenged me to  
27 assess my subjective, implicit biases and assumptions that cultural competence taught me didn’t  
28 influence my professional work. I have primarily worked in predominantly White spaces and am  
29 challenged with evaluating many interpersonal encounters through a lens of microaggressions  
30 (Sue et al., 2007), those subtle markings of racism and discrimination that are largely covert. I  
31 work to remind myself that there are White people who are aware of their skin color privilege  
32 and make real efforts to be allies. I must be open to these efforts, even with periodic missteps, to  
33 remain inviting and recognize the process as sincere mutuality and partnership in working  
34 together towards justice. I chose a profession where I felt I could make a difference, facilitate a  
35 sense of hope and empowerment to those who felt powerless. This powerlessness had been my  
36 experience; social work was my way of giving back. As I’ve grown in my knowledge of cultural  
37 humility and have had to take true stock of the fullness of my social identities, marginalized  
38 alongside the privileges I have, I feel I’ve grown in my sensitivity and compassion of what it  
39 means to not only be an ally, but be open to those who are willing to stand for and with me. I’ve  
40 had the experience to be an advocate for a White colleague who felt powerless due to position  
41 status. This same colleague was also an ally, willing to speak out about race and discrimination  
42 when I was a lone voice, and sometimes just stop by my office and touch base when she could  
43 feel the oppressive climate of the workplace. I see it as a partnership that must be thoughtfully  
44 cultivated with genuineness, transparency, with ongoing diligence to integrity, honesty, and  
45 accountability. It’s hard work. I know what it feels like when one is treated as less than, an

1 outsider, worthless. And I know how comforting it is to have someone there beside you, not  
2 words, but the *presence* of someone which tells you *I'm here with you*, and it feels real. My  
3 identities suggest I will navigate both sides of allyship (beneficiary and facilitator) throughout  
4 my professional career. I also know I must do this work by being truthful to myself about me  
5 and enacting this truth in my work with others. For me this means acknowledging to myself  
6 when I feel angry, frustrated, depleted, and disheartened by both personal and larger societal  
7 occurrences illustrative of discrimination and oppression. I sigh deep, exhale more deeply, and  
8 reset my mindset beyond just my experiences. I remind myself that there is still much to which  
9 my privilege grants. I can't give up. And so, despite these feelings, I remain invested and  
10 committed to persevere towards equity, inclusion, and social justice.

11  
12 *Judith:* As a White person who benefits from the US culture of White supremacy, I believe that  
13 the traditional model of cultural “competency” can contribute to a misunderstanding of how I  
14 can truly engage in allyship. My experience is that White privilege has to be named, understood,  
15 acknowledged, and unlearned/resisted/used for intentional purposes to dismantle oppression  
16 within the context of White supremacy. If I am taught to believe that I can *learn* about other  
17 cultures and become culturally *competent* and *must be an ally*, the locus of power and control  
18 remains with me. If I learn that cultural *humility* requires a significant shift in thinking and  
19 perceiving and responding to the world, then I can give up some of my power and turn to  
20 authentic mutual relationships to *enact allyship*. I am learning that allyship is a verb, not a noun  
21 or an identity. Allyship is “a lifelong process of building relationships based on trust,  
22 consistency and accountability with marginalized individuals and/or groups” (PeerNetBC,  
23 2016). I have to be engaged in action that reflects my intention to address inequities and  
24 oppression at multiple levels and in many forms in order to enact true allyship (Ferber, 2010).  
25 This includes teaching and training about oppression, privilege, and social justice; using feminist  
26 participatory action research methods to collaborate with and learn from formerly incarcerated  
27 women; mentoring students of color; publishing and presenting with students and colleagues  
28 representative of diverse backgrounds about racial and social justice; and community activism.  
29 This stands in stark contrast to the idea that I can become culturally competent, which implies I  
30 now hold the cultural knowledge and that I can *be an ally*. I became acutely aware as I expanded  
31 my efforts in allyship that this sometimes places me in vulnerable positions. I have been singled  
32 out as a *troublemaker* and rebuffed during my career as a forensic social worker within  
33 hierarchical correctional structures for my active attempts to advocate for prisoners and to  
34 examine and change inequitable workplace policies and practices. I have been marginalized by  
35 some in dominant groups when my allyship efforts put me in conflict with existing power  
36 structures, even within human service agencies. These risks can deter folks from continued  
37 allyship efforts. I had to find people with whom I could share these experiences and from whom  
38 I could get honest feedback and sincere support in order to feel strong enough to face these  
39 challenges.

### 40 41 **Cultural Humility, Allyship, and The Cycles of Socialization and Liberation**

42  
43 *Judith:* Conceptual frameworks that have greatly contributed to my own journey in learning  
44 about engaging in allyship founded in cultural humility, as well as to my teaching social work  
45 students about allyship, are Bobbie Harro's cycle of socialization and cycle of liberation (Adams

1 et al., 2000, 2013). Harro (in Adams et al., 2000) illustrates how we are socialized to systems of  
2 power and oppression that already exist through multiple social avenues. This conceptualization  
3 helps to decrease shame and guilt for those of us with privilege, particularly those of us who  
4 benefit from White supremacy culture, thus we are more able to embark on the cycle of  
5 liberation whereby we join communities of folks in order to combat structural oppression and to  
6 use our privilege for social justice work. Research (e.g., Sabat et al., 2013) has identified  
7 obstacles to allyship: fear of negative reactions from those in dominant groups, making mistakes  
8 that will lead to negative responses by those in under-represented groups, rebukes by  
9 supervisors, and being marginalized by peers. Understanding the cycle of socialization can help  
10 us to recover, learn, and try again when we make mistakes, which are inevitable in allyship  
11 efforts. And beginning the journey into the cycle of liberation allows us to reach out to others, to  
12 take up the torch of social change together, and to feel as though we are actively changing both  
13 ourselves and our world from a place of love and connection. It has taken work to find people  
14 with whom I can be honest and open, and from whom I expect honesty in return, including  
15 honesty about my mistakes.

16  
17 An example of this is when a group of White faculty, including myself, decided to create a  
18 mentorship program for new faculty. We planned to get *service credit* for being mentors in this  
19 program and instituted the program without consultation with new faculty. Not a good start. I  
20 proceeded to assign myself as a mentor to a new faculty person who was a person of color and  
21 attempted to engage them in mentorship meetings so I could “show them the ropes.” Things did  
22 not go well, and I couldn’t understand why for a few months. Despite my efforts to reach out and  
23 be helpful, their response was tepid. After a particularly trying interaction, and some serious  
24 self-reflection, I had an epiphany.

25  
26 I was not engaging in genuine allyship from a place of cultural humility. I had made assumptions  
27 about the new faculty person’s needs; I had not asked them if they wanted me as a mentor, or  
28 indeed if they sought allyship at all. I had, in fact, enacted my White privilege much to my  
29 shame. I cried. I yelled. I called colleagues to help me accept what I had done and to learn from  
30 my mistakes. It took a few tries before I found a colleague who didn’t come to my defense, but  
31 who supported me in fully acknowledging my mistake. Knowing that the cycle of socialization  
32 played a role in my being blind to my White privilege in this circumstance helped me to move  
33 past my regrets and take action. I apologized to the new faculty person and acknowledged my  
34 enactment of White privilege and they were gracious and forgiving. And then I worked hard to  
35 learn from my mistakes.

36  
37 I learned that genuine allyship in the context of cultural humility is only possible when it is truly  
38 mutual. A contrived mentorship program is far from an organic connection between two or more  
39 people who learn from each other, support each other, and, when mutually agreed upon, one  
40 person uses their privilege to advocate for more equitable treatment, policies, and practices.  
41 Allyship and cultural humility, like all socially just practices, are only sustainable when driven  
42 by genuine mutual relationships. As attributed to Lilla Watson, “If you have come to help me,  
43 you are wasting your time. If you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine,

1 then let us work together” (Lilla: International Women’s Network, n.d.).<sup>1</sup>

2

3 *Castagna*: I will never forget that when I really needed an ally, I had none. I remember being  
4 surprised when a salary negotiation ended with the discovery that I was being paid nearly ten  
5 thousand dollars less than my White counterparts. I had hoped that the friends I had who were in  
6 positions of power would stand up for me and demand change so that they would retain me as a  
7 valuable colleague. It didn’t happen. I understand this through the lens of the cycle of  
8 socialization (Adams et al., 2000, 2013). This cycle teaches us that people of color have less  
9 value. In a predominantly White institution, my White colleagues were not socialized to  
10 challenge oppressive systems in defense of a colleague of color experiencing injustice. I now  
11 believe that those whom I perceived as allies did not recognize their privileges and positions of  
12 power within the organization. Furthermore, without me having to ask for help, there was no  
13 sense of duty to act on the information being revealed by me as a social justice issue. In fact,  
14 they may have perceived the risk of intervening to be too great. I left the organization  
15 disappointed. These friends were *good people*, but they were not allies.

16

17 I never thought I could act in an ally role to a White woman until I came to understand my own  
18 intersections and positions of privilege. As someone who now has the privilege allotted by my  
19 educational attainment and my job in the professoriate, I have become an ally to colleagues and  
20 students from various marginalized communities. This has included using my voice to support  
21 students in financial need; students with various barriers to accessing education or to having  
22 their educational needs be met; sexual minorities; and students for whom English language  
23 proficiency, immigration status, or other sociocultural barriers might exist. Mentoring a White,  
24 working class, first-generation college student in research is one such allied relationship.  
25 Advocating for language supports for multilingual students at the institutional level is one way I  
26 act as an ally to my students who struggle with language barriers. I serve on committees where I  
27 can advocate for the hiring of faculty and staff from underrepresented backgrounds. My  
28 participations in these larger system practices are not done in response to a particular person’s  
29 need for an ally. Rather, they are done in preparation for the ones who will come with the hope  
30 that they will feel welcomed when they arrive. My actions were not without risk to myself. Yet I  
31 speak up and speak out from my position as a respected faculty person who has “proven” her  
32 intellect and worth to those within the power structure. Nevertheless, I dare not forget that I am  
33 vulnerable as a pre-tenured, Black woman. For me, the risk is worth taking because silence is  
34 often seen as complicity.

35

36 *Wendy*: The experiences shared by my colleagues of needing an ally and efforts at being an ally  
37 resonate deeply with me. I have been on both sides of this experience. As my colleague Castagna  
38 recognizes, being a good person is not synonymous with being an ally. Like her, I’ve had similar  
39 interactions. Because the relationship was experienced as collegial and generally supportive, it

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<sup>1</sup> Lilla Watson is an Indigenous Kangulu artist. According to the Wikipedia entry on Lilla Watson (2018, April 23), “She is often credited with th[is] quote...[It] has served as a motto for many activist groups in Australia and elsewhere. A possible origin for the quote is a speech given by Watson at the 1985 United Nations Decade for Women Conference in Nairobi. Watson has said of this quote that she was ‘not comfortable being credited for something that had been born of a collective process’ and prefers that it be credited to ‘Aboriginal activists group, Queensland, 1970s.’” See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lilla\\_Watson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lilla_Watson).

1 was assumed to be an allyship—on their part and mine. Unfortunately, when I needed that  
2 allyship, or thought I had one, there was no one. Judith’s recount of efforts gone astray, yet a  
3 willingness to challenge herself *and* be held accountable, to not find an easy out, affirms the real  
4 work of enacting allyship. It is these authentic and transparent experiences that have fostered the  
5 relationship between and among the three of us as colleagues while also helping us to embody  
6 and engage in concrete ways the cycle of liberation. In this collaborative, interpersonal  
7 partnership we share, we also garner a growing respect, support, and affection for one another,  
8 regardless of whether we get it right or not. Our connection in this work is unconditional. We  
9 challenge one another towards building up and not breaking down. We take honest risks with  
10 each other and maintain an atmosphere of feedback and accountability. We also smile, laugh,  
11 and enjoy each other in the fullness of the unique and multidimensional persons that we each  
12 are. This personifies the cycle of liberation in that we have built a community and remain active  
13 in developing and deepening it, one where we share in our similarities and appreciate our  
14 differences (Adams et al., 2000, 2013). It is not an exclusive community; we are also equally  
15 dedicated to expanding it. We are committed to sharing transparently our efforts and how we  
16 engage in that community, triumphs and failures, in hopes of encouraging others to take the  
17 mask of cultural competence off and fully immerse themselves in this mutual work of cultural  
18 humility and allyship.

### **Lessons Learned and Paths Forward**

22 Through this collaborative partnership and deepening solidarity, it is clear to us that further  
23 research focused on the relationship between cultural humility and allyship is needed in order to  
24 guide our practice. Cultural humility and allyship expand beyond the objective lens of cultural  
25 competence by their intentional nature of self-acknowledgement in the broader context of  
26 diversity dynamics and ways in which this interplay influences what we consider our life’s work.  
27 Further research highlighting these focal points seems critical and necessary, particularly as we  
28 recognize the shifting socio-cultural-political landscape that can no longer remain colorblind. In  
29 addition, those in the helping professions must utilize research methodologies such as  
30 community-based participatory action research (Branom, 2012; Hacker, 2013) which takes into  
31 account the dynamics of power and privilege and is designed to empower historically  
32 marginalized people towards changing oppressive systems. Allyship can happen in all aspects of  
33 our work. Community-based participatory action research provides space for marginalized  
34 voices and experiences with true allies facilitating this process. Collaborating with students of  
35 color in research and publications can enact allyship. We advocate striving for cultural humility  
36 and allyship within the researcher-participant relationship and the prioritization of social and  
37 racial justice in our research agendas. For example, inviting research participants to become  
38 involved in shaping research projects as well as in resulting social action can be a powerful act  
39 of allyship. What follows are some additional reflective thoughts about lessons learned in our  
40 work toward cultural humility and allyship. Know that we also recognize these learning  
41 moments as opportunities for continual growth and self-reflection.

43 *Wendy:* As a Black woman, I’m learning to let anger and frustration go. To be clear, not the  
44 stereotypical depiction of “angry Black woman,” but as a professional who recognizes how  
45 overwhelming it is the work of dismantling systemic oppression and structural disadvantages. As



1 noted earlier by Judith, a “lifelong process of building relationships” (PeerNetBC, 2016) fuels  
2 my hope and helps me to value small, incremental steps as beneficial and worthwhile. It’s seeing  
3 the marathon of this work—time, effort, and energy—towards long-term change and  
4 sustainability. The ideas of cultural humility and allyship are also empowering me to broaden  
5 my network not just professionally, but also socially and civically. True allyship is not limited to  
6 our professional activities, but I also see it as a charge to each of us as global citizens. What kind  
7 of neighborhood do I want to live in, or create? How do I take time to get to know those in my  
8 larger town, city, community? What initiatives are available, or need to be developed, to support  
9 equity and equality? These are key questions I actively seek to answer as part of my commitment  
10 to practice cultural humility within the larger social context.

11  
12 *Judith:* I find strength to confront structural oppression and hope for social justice in the  
13 relationships within which I work to enact cultural humility and allyship. Without these genuine  
14 friendships within which I can learn and grow, the work would be hollow. I believe that the field  
15 of social work needs to more fully encompass a model of cultural humility in our teaching, our  
16 practice, our research, and our established required competencies. In addition, we need to  
17 embrace allyship as an action, not an identity. We need to provide students and practitioners  
18 with models of cultural humility and allyship, opportunities to learn about these concepts, spaces  
19 to be self-reflective, as well as uncomfortable, in the application of these ideas to themselves and  
20 their relationships. Castagna, Wendy, and I have talked often about the importance of bi-racial  
21 teaching as well as teaching pairs that include faculty with privilege and those in other  
22 historically marginalized groups. We have found that offering an opportunity for students and  
23 practitioners to witness conversations and enactments of cultural humility and allyship in action  
24 is a powerful tool for challenging the status quo in a system of structural power and oppression.  
25 These experiences with Castagna and Wendy have also been transforming for me. In order to  
26 move the helping professions forward in this crucial area we must think creatively and offer  
27 viable avenues for the journey to our colleagues, our students, and our clients.

28  
29 *Castagna:* We have argued for cultural humility as a necessary prerequisite for the important  
30 work of socially just allyship. As three women who also represent various other social identities,  
31 we routinely use one another to stay culturally humble and deeply reflective. We are allies in the  
32 work of institutional diversity. Through our teaching, community service, and professional  
33 consultation and training, we are dedicated to dismantling oppressive systems by helping others  
34 gain the cultural humility to become active allies in social justice. We assert that enacting  
35 allyship from a place of cultural humility isn’t just about saving “someone” a seat at the table.  
36 It’s about extending the leaves on that table and making more seats available for the ones we  
37 have yet to meet. Lastly, it’s about ensuring that everyone is welcome and that every voice will  
38 be valued.

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### 13 14 **For Further Reading**

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16 “Ally Bill of Responsibilities” by Dr. Lynn Gehl:

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19 “Allyship & Solidarity Guidelines” compiled by Unsettling America:

20 <http://unsettlingamerica.wordpress.com/allyship>

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22 “No More ‘Allies’” by Mia McKenzie:

23 <http://www.blackgirldangerous.org/2013/09/30/no-more-allies>

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25 “Things Allies Need to Know” by Jamie Utt:

26 <http://everydayfeminism.com/2013/11/things-allies-need-to-know>

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