

FEEDBACK / 'Women's issues' in this country have traditionally been framed in terms of white, middle-class experience — the time has come time to tackle the concerns of the rest: native women, black women, Asian women, immigrant women . . .

Moving toward a new emancipation

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Women's Day Doesn't Have Much To Do With Women, said the headline on a recent *Globe and Mail* article in which writer Donna Laframboise complained that the event focused on racist issues instead of such topics as child care and contraception. The origins of International Women's Day can be traced to protests by women textile workers over a fire in New York City in the first decade of this century that killed 146 women workers. The women protested against the overcrowded, dangerous working conditions and exploitative wages they encountered in that city.

In 1910, at the Second International Conference of Socialist Women, Clara Zetkin proposed that March 8 be set aside each year in commemoration of women's struggles. The first International Women's Day was therefore celebrated in many countries on March 8, 1911, with the theme of "international female suffrage" — a victory that our sisters in South Africa still cannot celebrate.

In Toronto, the International Women's Day Committee was formed in the spring of 1978 as an anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal organization. Through years of debate and

struggle, it evolved to reflect the realities faced by women in Toronto.

The theme for Toronto's 1987 Women's Day was "fighting racism and sexism together." Carol Allen and Judy Persad gave a speech that moved and touched everyone: "Last year . . . we said we are going to build a new women's movement in Toronto — a women's movement which will integrate the fight against racism and the fight against sexism. Racism and sexism have to be integrated into the movement because they are already in our lives. The women's movement must represent all women — the fight against racism is everybody's fight."

Racism is a priority for the women's movement in Canada today. It is appalling that Ms. Laframboise calls a day devoted to racism "an opportunity for solidarity lost and squandered." It is frightening that she holds a degree in women's studies. Under the banner of feminism, Ms. Laframboise sets out to maintain that celebrations in Toronto are "not relevant to most women."

Ms. Laframboise points out that it is not the first time that racism has been given a high profile. As early as 1977, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women recommended that the federal Human Rights Commission conduct an inquiry into the socio-economic and discrimination problems of immigrant and visible-minority women. Since the 1980s, immigrant and visible-minority women's organizations have put forward their issues.

Self-determination is key for the liberation of all women. Because we understand how male dominance has controlled women's lives, we can also make the links to racism and imperialism in women's oppression.

"Stop the racist war from Oka to the Gulf — make the links," which was the 1991 theme of Toronto's International Women's Day, should be of interest to all women in this country. Canada spent millions on war in the Persian Gulf while social programs at home are at risk.

It is disheartening that there is still a perception among white and liberal women that the movement "belongs" to them — a claim to the ownership of a feminism built on a white, Western model. This leads to white women resisting, or giving little credence to, issues that are critical to the lives of native women, black women, Asian women and immigrant women.

Such concerns, which include racism, immigration, refugees, language training and employment equity, may not appear to be women's issues to some.

Women of colour have been at the fore-

front in demanding that these issues be addressed by pushing and challenging the assumptions and the politics of the women's movement. Articles like Ms. Laframboise's make changing the framework of the women's movement in Canada truly painful.

Traditionally, "women's issues" have been framed in terms of white, middle-class experience. Addressing them has not resulted in advances for all women. Feminists must look at who has set the agenda. The advancement of women is not a linear struggle. The issues of oppressed women in this country need attention.

At a national conference called *Moving Forward: Creating a Feminist Agenda for the 1990s*, held at Trent University last June, keynote speaker Rozena Maart said, "If feminists cannot move forward toward the emancipation of all women, we should not hesitate to call it anything else but self-aggrandizement."

Clearly some women have made the links.

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Chapter Eight

Step 5: Becoming an Ally

In the early 1990s, I co-lead a workshop called "Unlearning Racism" with a friend and colleague who is African-Nova Scotian.¹ When you begin to reach something, you find out what you do not know. This workshop was truly a learning adventure for me.

Leading anti-racist education is akin to tip-toeing through a mine field. Sometimes we could feel the group carefully skirting a possible blow-up; sometimes we stepped on a mine. When this happened, there was an explosion, an angry backlash from some of the white participants. We conducted the workshop five times before we made it all the way through without the process being completely derailed by conflict.

Following one of our most explosive workshops, I began to list the different reactions of the white participants to this process of unlearning racism. Later, the descriptions began to fit into three rough groups: 1) the "backlashers," who deny the existence of racism while making racist statements and expressing outrage that they are forced to listen to stories of racism; 2) the "guilty," who personalize the issue and become defensive and paralyzed; and 3) the "learners" or "allies," who use any opportunity to learn more and then act on what they learn.

"Backlashers" are those who say: "That all happened a long time ago; don't blame me," or "I'm a good person; I've never done anything nasty to anyone of a colour different from mine; don't blame me." Any excuse will do for a "backlasher" who is trying to avoid responsibility for racism—"It's a theoretical problem," "I feel silenced by Black people; I can't say anything right," "My brother worked in Jamaica and said there it's the other way around," "Don't jump on me, I was just asking a question," "Some of my best friends are Black," and above all, "I'm not racist." There are always deeply felt emotions coming through these statements, primarily anger. These participants fail to see the collective aspect of the oppression, cannot see their own privilege, and take too little personal responsibility.

The "guilty," on the other hand, fail to see the collective aspect of the

oppression and take on too much personal responsibility. They are crushed, unable to move. They feel powerless and sometimes react angrily against the person or situation they think disempowered them by making them aware of the problem. They often seek forgiveness from someone they see as representative of the oppressed group. Privilege is often invisible to the "guilty" group, too, or if they see it, it adds to their immobilizing guilt.

"Backlashers" rarely understand the meaning of oppression for those who experience it; the "guilty" are all too aware of it, but they are inclined to react to their own oppression and that of others as if nothing can be done. "Backlashers" tend to think the current North American model of "democracy" is working and people could solve their problems if they tried. The "guilty" also believe there is democracy here, and that they, as voters and citizens, have the power. If something is not working, it must be their fault.

Members of the "ally" group, on the other hand, are much more critical of the real power structures of North America and the world. They look at the world from a "structural" perspective. They have an understanding of themselves as part of a people or various peoples. They understand that if something is done to another member of their own group, it could have happened to them. For example, they understand that, if a woman is raped, it is not because she asked for it, or dressed seductively, or went where she should not have; it is because she is a woman, and it could happen to any woman. Likewise, "allies" understand that, as part of various oppressor groups (white, male, able-bodied, heterosexual, middle or above in the class structure), they did not individually bring the situation about and they cannot just reach out with goodwill and solve it. They understand that they must act with others to contribute to change. They believe that to do nothing is to reinforce the *status quo*; not to decide is to decide; if you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem. Many "allies" still drive themselves too hard and try to do too much, but they do understand that they are part of something much larger and older than they are. They take responsibility for helping to solve problems of historical injustice without taking on individual guilt. Most look for what they can do, with others, in a strategic way, and try to accept their limitations beyond that.

This latter understanding of power relationships is rare in our society. The political/economic/ideological system that keeps power in a few hands has been very successful in developing methods of childrearing and education that ensure North Americans do not understand power and how it works.² Those who do understand have usually worked their way to their

insights through their own experience, reflection, and efforts to work towards social change.

"Allies" are distinguished by several characteristics:

- their sense of connection with other people, all other people;
- their grasp of the concept of social structures and collective responsibility;
- their lack of an individualistic stance and ego, although they have a strong sense of self;
- their sense of process and change;
- their understanding of their own process of learning; their realistic sense of their own power;
- their grasp of "power-with" as an alternative to "power-over;"
- their honesty, openness, and lack of shame about their own limitations;
- their knowledge and sense of history;
- their acceptance of struggle;
- their understanding that good intentions do not matter if there is no action against oppression;
- their knowledge of their own roots.

These are the characteristics of allies; they are also characteristics that mark people who are well advanced in their own liberation process.

Because of the connection I see between the experience of powerlessness and the need to find safety through controlling others, I believe that an experience of oppression is necessary for a person to learn to be an oppressor. Margaret Green's account of her anti-racism therapy groups strongly supports this connection. She tells a story about a woman working on her difficulty welcoming new immigrants who came to the advice centre where she worked:

I suggested she try welcoming me. As a Jew and a foreigner I could never have enough of it, I explained, and besides, no one had ever welcomed me to England anyway. She tried. She was extremely timid and tentative. I asked if she had ever been made to feel welcome. She burst into tears; no, of course she hadn't. There was no warmth for her in her family; she had always felt unwanted. (1987:194)

After this and several other examples, Green concludes: "One of my

assumptions is that no one would ever willingly choose to take on the role of oppressor if they themselves had not been systematically oppressed" (195).

Because of my observation that people who approach other oppressed people as allies are those who are involved in their own process of liberation from oppression, I also believe that one must be in the process of liberation from one's own oppression to become an ally in another's liberation. Green's experience again supports mine. She says:

You cannot be proud of other cultures and delight in their richness if you are not proud of your own. By "proud" I don't mean the defensiveness which hides feelings of shame and inferiority and I don't mean that one doesn't question certain aspects of one's culture. A sense of one's own rich roots is however essential if one is to meet on an equal level with a person from a different background. (1987:196)

I don't mean to suggest that everyone who experiences oppression becomes an oppressor, and everyone engaged in their own liberation becomes an ally. Far from it. What I am saying is that I don't believe it is possible to become an oppressor without experiencing oppression nor become an ally without being involved in your own experience of liberation.

Learning About Yourself as an Oppressor

The process of learning about one's own oppression is different from learning about one's self as an oppressor. The former process has experience clearly as a base. It is a transition from experience to consciousness through reflection.

When learning to see yourself as an oppressor, the experience is by definition hidden from you, because part of the process of becoming a member of an oppressor group is to be cut off from the ability to identify with the experience of the oppressed. It is this lack of empathy, this denial that anyone is hurt (at least, anyone viewed as fully human) that makes oppression possible. When the oppression is not part of your own experience, you can only understand it through hearing others' experience, along with a process of analysis and drawing parallels.

Many people resist beginning the process of becoming an ally because it is so difficult and painful. Is it more difficult and painful than your own liberation? I think so. I have found it much harder to understand and

accept myself in my oppressor roles than in those where I am the oppressed.

The righteous anger of understanding one's own oppression releases a great deal of energy and propels the process forward. Facing fear often releases energy and produces a major shot first of euphoria, then of good, solid self-confidence. The process of bonding with others dealing with the same oppression creates a deep level of sympathy and understanding, a growing pride in one's recovered identity, and a shared language that is as satisfyingly secret as the "pig latin" of childhood.³ There can be lightning fast communication among women in a room or among lesbians in a room. There is laughter or a flurry of glances, a smile, a comment with a double meaning, and you know "you" all understood, and "they" did not.

Coming to understand one's identities as an oppressor is often an enervating process. It means being shut out from someone else's secret language; it involves accepting your inheritance of a shameful and evil past. There is guilt, that useless and draining non-emotion. There is always that unsettling knowledge that you cannot see what is going on as clearly as the oppressed group can. The oppressed always know a great deal more about the oppressor than the oppressor knows about the oppressed.

Understanding one's own position as an oppressor, without being completely immobilized, also requires a balance between understanding oneself as an individual and as part of a collective reality. This balance is rare in the culture we live in. Modern Western thinking is extremely individualistic. Our ties to the land and our own history, community, and culture have been severed. With so little understanding of ourselves as part of a collective entity, it becomes very difficult to figure out our own responsibility for patterns larger than ourselves.

Failure to understand collective structures leads to what Kare Kirkham calls "overpersonalization." In her article "Teaching About Diversity: Navigating the Emotional Undercurrents," she says:

Many majority group members do not move quickly or comfortably back and forth between their individual identity and their identity as a member of a racial or gender group in this society. If they do think of themselves as a member of a group, it is often associated with negative emotions: feeling stereotyped or threatened, etc. Therefore, majority group members may enter a discussion less prepared to sort out what is being said about the behavior of numbers of whites (or men) as experienced by others and the impact of their own individual behavior.... When asked to re-

spond to the question of who really is racist and/or sexist, many majority group individuals in my research and teaching experience, assume: "If I didn't intend something as racist or sexist then it is not racist/sexist." In other words, the general criteria they use in testing for racism/sexism is an overpersonalized one. They believe that personal motive determines the presence of racism or sexism in interactions. (Kirkham 1988/89:51)

"How To" — Becoming an Ally

Having written that title, I must now admit that I cannot tell anyone exactly how to become an ally. I can, however, use my growing analysis of the process and my experience to offer some guidelines. Most people in our society do not yet see the connections between different forms of oppression or even have a general sense of how oppression works. Therefore, we still find ourselves dealing in most instances with one form of oppression at a time, and in a given setting, we are either in the role of oppressed or ally. I hope these observations will be as useful to you as they have been to me when I find myself in the ally role.

1. It is important to be a worker in your own liberation struggle, whatever it is. Learn, reflect on, and understand the patterns and effects of oppression, take action with others, take risks, walk towards your fear to find your power.
2. Try to help members of your own group understand oppression and make the links among different forms of oppression.
3. I cannot overstress the need to listen. Listen and reflect.
4. Remember that everyone in the oppressor group is part of the oppression. It is ridiculous to claim you are not sexist if you are a man or not racist if you are white and so on. No matter how much work you have done on that area of yourself, there is more to be done. All members of this society grow up surrounded by oppressive attitudes; we are married in it. It runs in our veins; it is as invisible to us as the air we breathe. I do not believe anyone raised in Western society can ever claim to have finished ridding themselves completely of their oppressive attitudes. It is an ongoing task, like keeping the dishes clean. In fact, the minute I hear someone claim to be free of the attitudes and

actions of a certain oppression (as in "I'm not racist") I know they have barely begun the process. Humility is the mark of someone who has gone a ways down the road and has caught a glimpse of just how long the road is.

There is a parallel here with the principles of the twelve-step addiction recovery process. Just as the twelve-step programs teach that the process of healing from addiction is never finished, so it is with the process of unlearning oppression. A white person never becomes non-racist but is always a "recovering racist," more often referred to as "anti-racist."

There is another reason members of an oppressor group are always oppressors, no matter how much individual learning we have done: until we change the politics and economics of oppression, we are still "living off the avails."⁴ We would not be where we are, doing what we are doing, with the skills and access we have, if we did not have the colour, gender, sexual orientation, appearance, age, class, or physical abilities we have. Resources and power continue to come to us because we are members of the dominant group in relation to the particular form of oppression where we seek to be allies.⁵ So, until we succeed in making a more humane world, yes, we are racist (or ageist, or classist, or heterosexist, and so forth). Understanding this is part of learning to think structurally rather than individually. It is part of avoiding overpersonalization of the issues.⁶

5. Having accepted that every member of an oppressor group is an oppressor, try not to feel that this makes you a "bad" person. Self-esteem does not have to mean distancing yourself from the oppressor role; it can come instead from taking a proud part in the struggle to end oppression. This involves learning to separate guilt from responsibility. Guilt means taking on all the weight of history as an individual; responsibility means accepting your share of the challenge of changing the situation. Members of oppressor groups spend a great deal of energy in denying responsibility for oppression. What would happen if all that energy could be put to work figuring out how to end it?
6. Remember that in the oppressor role you cannot see the oppression as clearly as the oppressed group can. When people point out your oppressive attitudes or language to you, your first response should be to believe it. Ask questions and learn more about the oppression going on in that particular situation. Try not to leap to your own defence in

one of the many ways oppressors use to deny responsibility for oppression. Self-defence is an overpersonalized response.

It is true that you will likely meet members of the oppressed group who will want to claim that every little thing is oppressive and use it as a focus for their anger. You will also perhaps find members of the oppressed group who will try to use your efforts to unlearn oppression to manipulate you. It is all part of the process—their process. The point is not to defend yourself; it will not work anyway. If you can deal with your own defensive feelings, you can turn the situation into a discussion that you, and perhaps everyone else, can use to learn more about the oppression, and you will be less vulnerable to manipulation. The defensiveness, or guilt, is the hook for the manipulation.

Also, if you can use your own experience of liberation to understand the anger of the oppressed, you will be able to accept it as a member of an oppressor group, not as an individual. Leave their process—working through their anger—to the oppressed group. Give your attention to your own process—becoming an ally. Then we can all participate in the process we share, ending the oppression.

7. Count your privileges; keep a list. Help others see them. Break the invisibility of privilege.⁷

8. If you hear an oppressive comment or see an example of oppression at work, try to speak up first. Do not wait for a member of the oppressed group to point it out. Sometimes this draws a response of “Oh, I don’t mind,” “It was just a joke,” or even anger directed at you from a member of the oppressed group. That person may be speaking out of their internalized oppression, or you may be off base. Just accept it, if you can; admit it is not your experience. More often you will find members of the oppressed group grateful that they did not have to raise the issue for a change.

9. You must be patient and leave lots of room for the greater experience of members of the oppressed group, but there are also limits. If it becomes clear over time that you are being used or mistreated, say something and/or leave the situation. Here is an example: a group is interested in having you present as an ally for reasons of their safety or your contacts, legitimacy, or resources but is not ready to offer you any information or support. The message might be: “Just shut up and do everything we tell you and don’t ask questions.” It is also hardly fair for

the members of the oppressed group to direct all their anger, over a long period of time, at a well-meaning would-be ally. This is not reasonable treatment for anyone. It is fair for you to ask them to decide: do they want you to leave, or will they provide you with some support in your efforts to become an ally?

10. Try to avoid the trap of “knowing what is good for them.” Do not take leadership. They are the only ones who can figure out what is good for them, and developing their own leadership strengthens their organizations. It is fine to add thoughts or resources to the process by asking questions of the individuals with whom you have already built up some trust and equality, who will not take it as coming from an authority greater than themselves just because you are a member of the oppressor group. It is not all right to take time at their meeting or public gathering to present your own agenda or to suggest in any way that they do not understand or see the big picture.

11. Never take public attention or credit for an oppressed group’s process of liberation. Refuse to act as a spokesperson, even when reporters gravitate to you because they are more comfortable with you or curious about you. You should speak in public only if members of the oppressed group have asked you to speak from your point of view as an ally or to take a public role on their behalf because speaking out will be too dangerous for them.

12. Do not expect every member of the oppressed group to agree; does your group agree on everything?

13. Learn everything you can about the oppression—read, ask questions, listen. Your ignorance is part of the oppression. Find people in the oppressed group who like to teach and who see value in cultivating allies in general or you in particular. Ask them your questions. Do not expect every member of the oppressed group to be ready and willing to teach you. When you are in the ally role, you have privileges and comfort in your life that members of the oppressed group do not have because of the oppression; they may not want to also give you their time and energy so that you can learn about them. They may not have the time or the energy.

14. Support the process of unlearning oppression with other members of your own group. Do not usurp the role of communicating the experience of the oppression; that one belongs only to members of the oppressed group. You can, however, share with other members of the oppressor group the journey of becoming an ally; you can help break through others' ignorance of the oppression. Members of your own group might hear you when they cannot hear a member of the oppressed group.

15. Remember that you will probably have to go out of your way to maintain your friendships and connections with members of the oppressed group. Our society is set up to separate different groups. Without a little extra effort, you will live in different parts of town and never cross paths. On the other hand, do not fall over backwards. It is not good to ignore the friends and support base you have already established because you are spending all your time working at the barriers or becoming a "hanger on" of the oppressed community in an inappropriate way.

16. Try not to look to the oppressed group for emotional support. They will likely be ambivalent about you, happy on one hand to have your support, annoyed on the other at your remaining oppressor arrogance, your privilege, the attention you get as a member of the dominant group. Their energy is needed for their own struggle. This does not mean you will not receive support from members of the oppressed group, sometimes more than is warranted. For example, look at the praise men get for doing housework when women still do the vast majority of it. Try not to expect the oppressed group to be grateful to you.

17. Be yourself. Do not try to claim the roots and sense of connection that a history of oppression can give to a community if it is not your own. Do not become what the Mi'kmaq community calls a "Wannabe." Dig into your own roots. The oppressive history of the group you belong to is a burden you carry. Search out the history of allies from your group as well. Dig even deeper than that. Every group started out as a people with roots in the earth somewhere. Find your own connection with your people's history and the earth. If it is absolutely untraceable, find appropriate ones and rebuild roots and connection in the present for yourself. But do not try to steal someone else's; you cannot anyway.

18. Be yourself. Be honest. Express your feelings. Do not defend your internalized oppressor attitudes; say that it hurts to discover another piece of it. Do not sit on your doubts (except in public gatherings or meetings where you are an observer); ask them of someone you trust. The key word is ask. Assume that you are a learner; good learners are open.

Margaret Green provides a brief summary of the process of becoming an ally in matters of race:

There is usually a dawning realization that being an ally to a person of colour involves knowing a great deal about one's own background, remembering with pride one's own history of resisting injustice as well as one's participation in the history of racism. It involves being able to listen and tolerate the differences between people, expecting to make mistakes, knowing that people of colour will be angry with you to the point of what appears to be unreasonableness, and learning to take it. It involves also knowing that people who view you as an oppressor may try to mistreat you—but this you need never accept. (1987:204)

"How To"—Working with Allies when you are a Member of the Oppressed Group

When the shoe is on the other foot; that is, when you find yourself in a situation where it is your oppression under consideration, the same principles are in operation, but they are applied a little differently. Here are some guidelines, from my experience, for the situations where you are a member of an oppressed group dealing with allies.

1. Make a clear decision about if, why, when, and how you will work with allies. Do you want to work with allies at all? What can allies offer you that you would find useful? It is easy to know what you do not want members of the oppressor group to do; figure out what you do want them to do. Are there certain times, places, meetings, tasks, and functions where allies would be useful and others where their presence would be inappropriate? Be clear and conscious about your degree of openness to allies. Make sure everyone agrees on what is appropriate or at least can live with the decision without undermining the functions of the people who come in as allies. Working with

- allies brings a certain kind of struggle; be sure you are ready to enter into it.
2. Allies need support and information. Decide before you begin working with them what you can offer. There needs to be someone in your group who has the patience for teaching allies more about the oppression you are dealing with.
 3. Be wise and canny about who is really an ally. If you end up with members of the oppressor group who are acting out of guilt, trying to replace lost roots, taking centre stage, or telling you what to do, you will end up with more frustration than help. Also, beware of people who have no consciousness of their status as a member of the oppressor group or who are unaware of their own oppression in other areas.
 4. Do not lump members of the oppressor group together, thinking of them as all "white" or "straight" or "male." Remember that everyone is or was also a member of an oppressed group and that people identify more with the parts of themselves that have been oppressed. You may see a woman as white, when she thinks of herself as Jewish; or you may think of a man as male, when he identifies himself primarily as gay.
 5. You must listen too.
 6. Be kind. Allies are taking a risk, exposing themselves to a situation that is bound to be painful at times.
 7. Try to be clear about who is the enemy. There are lots of people who hate you and want to oppress you, punish you, and keep you in your place. There are the rich and powerful who are creating, sometimes deliberately, more of the oppression you suffer daily. Allies are usually well-meaning people without a great deal of power in the system. They are more vulnerable to your anger because they lack power and because of their very desire to be an ally. Do not waste resources fighting with them.
 8. Be yourself; be honest; express your opinions; be open. Working with allies is all part of a learning process for you too.

Working for Liberation and Becoming an Ally:

Using the Lessons Back and Forth

A person who is involved both in struggling for liberation as an oppressed person and in becoming an ally to other oppressed groups has a wonderful opportunity to learn by constantly drawing parallels back and forth. For example, when I want to figure out what I should do in a situation where I am the only white person, I begin by asking myself what I would want a man to do if he were the only one in this situation with a group of women. I do not necessarily do what I would want that hypothetical man to do, but thinking about it provides some guidelines.

Likewise, my own experience as an ally has given me a great deal of insight into the value of allies to the groups where I work on my own liberation. I observe the groups I belong to interacting creatively with allies or mistreating allies, and I can use my own experience as an ally to understand what is going on and figure out what to do about it. My own experience as an ally has also taught me how oppressed groups often overlook the information and insights allies can give them, especially when it comes to building a strategy for action.

Balance and Clarity

For each guideline I have written in this chapter, I can think of a time when the advice would be misleading. I know sometimes the guidelines almost sound contradictory. That is because the essence of the path to becoming an ally is balance and clarity. One must balance patience and confrontation, flexibility and limits, boundaries and allowances, learning and opinion, humility and self-confidence, your own oppression and others' struggles. Clarity comes from observation, reflection, and analysis in a specific situation. In the light of this process, the complexities of the relationships between the oppressed and allies can resolve into beautiful, clear patterns. There is even sometimes a feeling of being "crystal clear" inside. It is a "knowing." Then you know what to do and what will happen when you do it.

Notes

1. Our workshop was based on exercises adapted from CUSO (1990), Katz (1978), and Obedkoff (1989). It was published by OXFAM-Dewaric in Halifax, NS (now available for two dollars from "Unlearning Racism," c/o Fernwood Publishing, Box 9409, Stn. A, Halifax, N.S. B3K 5S3), (see Bishop and Carvery 1994).

2. See Miller (1981, 1983, 1986).
3. "Pig latin," the way we spoke it as children, involves moving the first letter to the end of every word. "Struggle against oppression" becomes "ruggles gainstra ppressiono."
4. "Living off the avails" is the charge brought against pimps who live on the earnings of prostitutes they control.
5. See McIntosh (1990) and Jensen (1998, 1999).
6. Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, playwright Wendy Lill (now also Member of Parliament for Dartmouth) has explored how systemic racism emerges through individuals despite a positive attitude, pleasant personality, and kind motives. See her powerful plays *The Occupation of Heather Rose* (1987) and *Sisters* (1991).
7. See note #5.

A Journal Entry: How Not to be an Ally: An open letter to the young man who spoke at our memorial rally on December 6th

On the evening of December 6, 1990, several hundred people gathered in Halifax's Grand Parade Square to remember the fourteen women killed at l'École Polytechnique in Montréal a year earlier. Their murderer had yelled at them that he hated feminists. Over the days leading up to the anniversary, the radio had reported men taking over microphones at similar memorial rallies to shout abuse at the women present, even to threaten them with a fate similar to the Montréal women. Some women stayed home from the December 6 rally out of fear; those who came were watchful and tense. The invited speakers were all women. During the rally, a young man took the microphone, obviously uninvited. Later I wrote this entry in my journal:

Dear young man:

I know you meant well when you took the microphone, uninvited, and spoke to us at the December 6 rally in memory of the women who died in Montréal a year ago. Your "contribution" added the only sour note in an amazingly powerful and expressive series of events that evening. You provided a crystal clear example of how not to be an ally to an oppressed group.

Your first error was your disrespect for the women who organized the rally. If you wanted to speak, why didn't you find the organizers and arrange with them in advance? That would have given the group the opportunity to think about it together and make a decision about when and how you might, or might not, fit in. Instead, you put one woman, the one holding the microphone, on the spot, forcing her to make a complex decision instantly and alone. You also spoiled the careful ordering of the speakers, which had been working beautifully.

Your second mistake was your complete insensitivity to the meaning of the event and the deep emotions and painful experiences that underlie it. Women have been subject to male violence and abuse for five thousand years. We all carry a deep fear of it somewhere inside us. The events we were recalling that night bring the fear very close to the surface. Also, the news all week had carried stories of men taking over the microphones at similar events and yelling abusive insults at the women present. When you took the microphone, in a manner that made it obvious to all present that

About the Author

Anne Bishop discovered sexism when she noticed that professors didn't hear what she said in class. If a male student repeated the point, it suddenly became worthy of attention. Later she went public as a lesbian and discovered what it feels like to be spit at, threatened over the telephone, and told by complete strangers that she was going to hell. She also experienced the reassurance that allies can provide. At the same time as she was reflecting on her own oppression, Anne was becoming increasingly involved in anti-poverty and anti-racism work. This forced her to see herself in another way, as a member of an oppressor group. These contrasting experiences planted the seeds for this book.

Anne completed a BA in Philosophy and Religious Studies in her early twenties. After twenty-five years of life education, she completed a Masters degree two days before her fiftieth birthday. The road in between included travel and work across Canada, in the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Iceland, Malta, Ghana, Togo, Nigeria, Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua.

In her mid-twenties, she spent a year at the Centre for Christian Studies in Toronto intending to become a Deaconess in the United Church of Canada. The Centre's radical and collective approach to education at the time changed her. She became a social activist and left the church. However, it was at the Centre that she learned the social analysis and facilitation skills that have formed the basis of her life's work.

Anne has had two "real jobs"—three years as coordinator of development education for Canadian University Services Overseas (CUSO) and eleven years of teaching adult continuing education. This included an analysis and skill-development program for leaders of low-income and marginalized communities, based on a similar course at the Centre for Christian Studies.

She now makes her living by taking freelance contracts in group facilitation, writing, editing, teaching, research and community develop-

ment. She has also worked at various times as a camp counsellor and director, fishplant worker, grape picker, union organizer, dog walker, farm worker, seamstress, used clothing store manager, cooperative development officer, and restaurant hostess.

She lives on a small organic farm with her partner and an ever-changing menagerie of sheep, chickens, cats, a dog and a draft horse.